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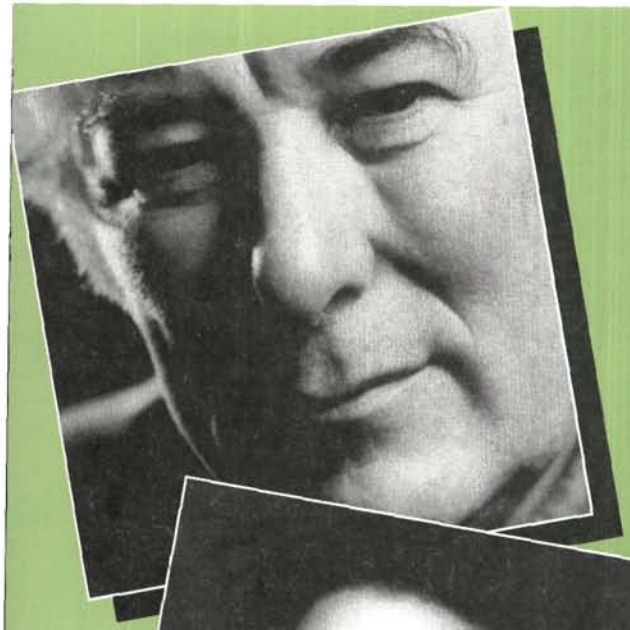

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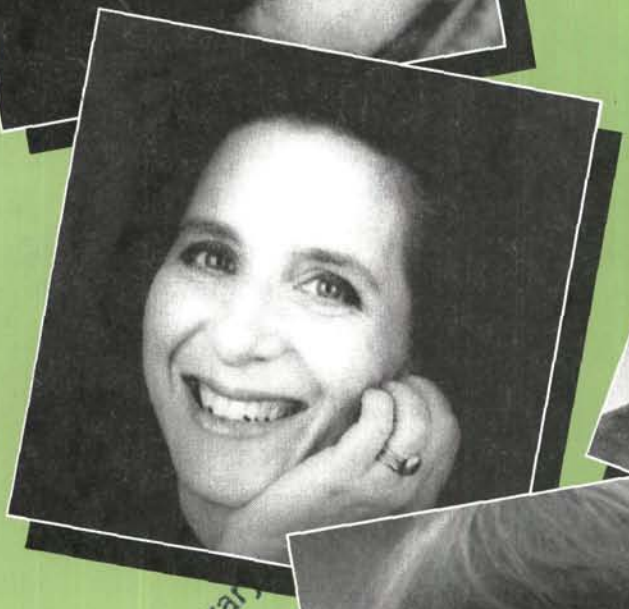

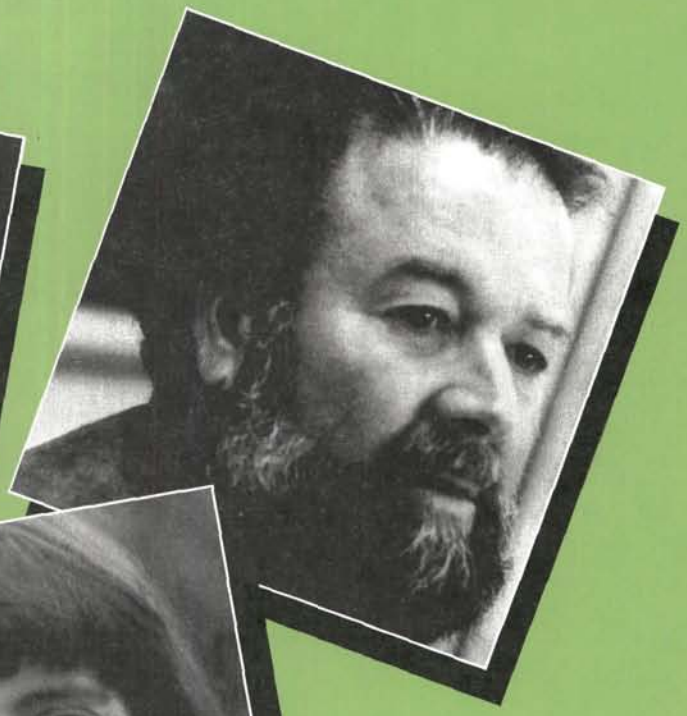

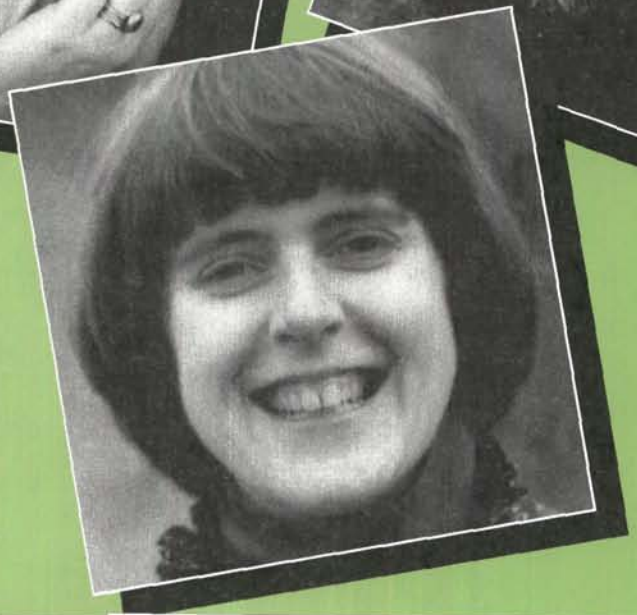

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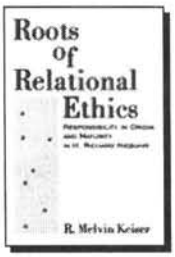

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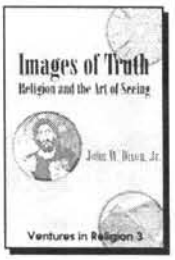

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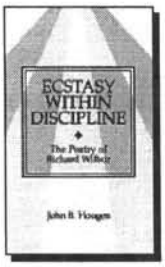

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COMMONWEAL

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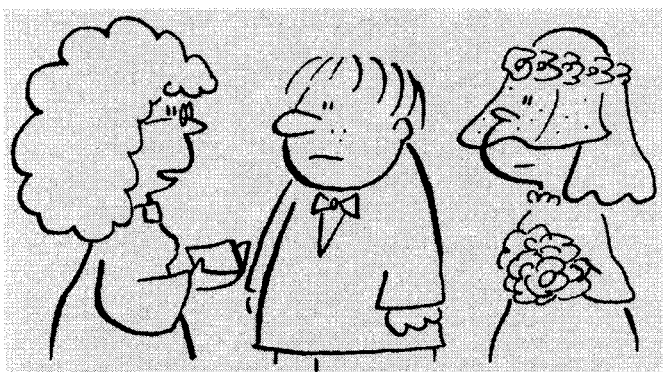

"Before I pronounce you husband and wife, I should tell you something about the side effects...."

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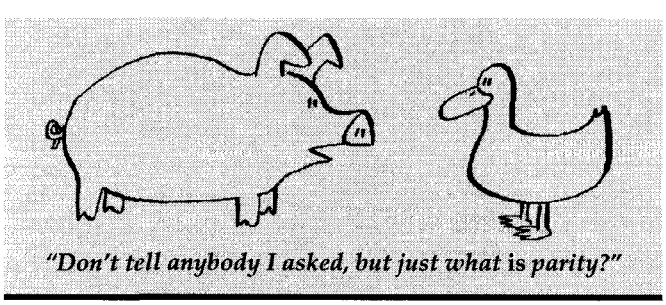

"Don't tell anybody I asked, but just what is parity?"

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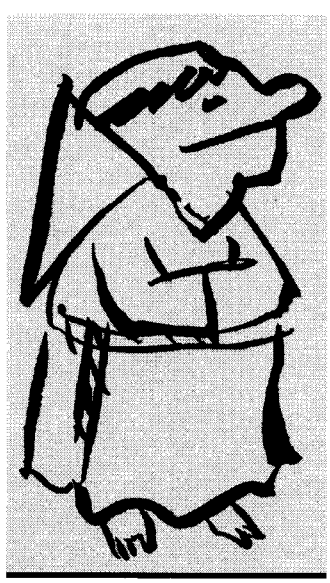

The Cloister Walk
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Lawrence S. Cunningham
Our regular booknotes writer, Lawrence S. Cunningham, writes, "Our hoary reactions to virgin saints, celibacy, the misogynist streak in our ascetical tradition are 'deconstructed' by the author's angle of vision, which looks with new but hardly naive eyes." 26

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To the Editors

In brief

Bob Lax
writes poems
like this.

(they show
the spirit
the matter
of fact
of bliss.)

RON MCNICOLL
Berkeley, Calif.

Caution: Poet passing

Thank you for running the article on Bob Lax ["The Poet Who Fell off the Map," April 19]. Lax was/is a piece of work, a wonderful, beautiful man with all the eccentricities a poet should have. At *Jubilee* he stood out as a contrast to Ed Rice; Ed was totally focused, and Lax was Lax.

Lax could go in a terrible hurry. One day some thirty-five years ago I was making my way up University Place toward the subway at Union Square. Coming down University Place was Lax, moving at breakneck speed, dodging bewildered, innocent pedestrians.

"Hey, Bob, where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Down to Washington Square. I want to sit on a bench and think."

DAVID K. REEVES
Princeton, N.J.

Lax at last

Kudos to James Uebbing for his excellent presentation on the much neglected poet Robert Lax. I have followed Lax's writing since his early work was published by Emil Antonucci. It brought great joy to see Lax at long last recognized for the fine poet he is.

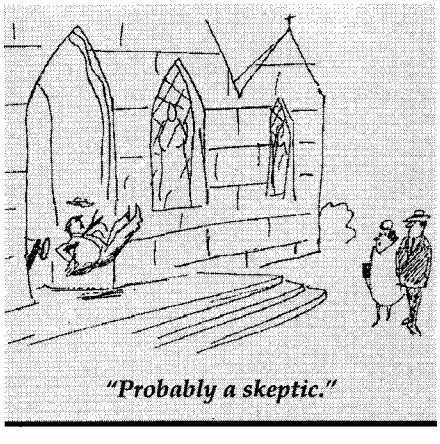
Incidentally, Antonucci also designed the recently reissued Sheed and Ward paperback edition of *A Catch of Anti-Letters*, containing the zany correspondence between Lax and Merton which the latter edited shortly before his death. More good news is that Arthur Biddle of the University of Vermont is editing the complete correspondence between these two old friends from Columbia. Meanwhile, we can look forward to Uebbing's collection, *Love Has a Compass*.

BROTHER PATRICK HART, O.C.S.O.
Trappist, Ky.

A teaching instrument

Though I am not an advocate of excommunication, I believe that James A. Coriden ["Even in Lincoln, Doubtful Laws Don't Apply," April 19] neglects the educational and medicinal functions it can serve in church governance. While Catholics who belong to some of the organizations listed by Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln (for example, Call to Action) are hardly giving scandal, that is not true of membership in other groups he named: the Hemlock Society, Planned Parenthood, Catholics for a Free Choice, which actively promote abortion or euthanasia.

Presumably Father Coriden would agree that public advocacy by Catholics of such practices is a serious departure from Catholic teaching. That is what Bishop Bruskewitz is saying—not only to those immediately affected but to the world at large—by his warning. Its seriousness can serve also as an invitation to return to the fullness of faith.



"Probably a skeptic."

Excommunication does not judge the spiritual condition of anyone; that is God's alone to judge. It is, or can be, a means of clarifying and underlining what it means to be a Catholic Christian. By making use of it in this way, Bishop Bruskewitz has done more than all the pastoral letters of the past fifty years to make clear that those who promote these things do evil and to that extent are not part of the *res catholica*.

PETER J. RIGA
Houston, Tex.

Separate isn't equal

In his essay [April 19] previewing the Supreme Court's consideration of the case brought by the federal government against the males-only admissions policy of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr., spins a loose web. VMI contends that it has recognized the rights of women by instituting a military program at prestigious Mary Baldwin College. A parallel case is awaiting the outcome of this case: The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina—which is like VMI both in its males-only policy and in its receipt of tax support—has set up a military program at a private women's school, Converse College in Spartanburg. There are elements in the state contributing large sums to finance this effort. But VMI is the trailblazer; its court victory is critical to the perpetuation of mythical Deep South mythologies about the Citadel.

Our goal, Gaffney says, must be equal educational opportunity, and he presents a veiled argument that it can best be achieved by separate-but-equal facilities. He takes issue with the federal brief's argument that "strict scrutiny" standards should be applied in cases involving classification by gender as well as to those involving race, and doubts that the Supreme Court will adopt that view.

(Continued on page 27)

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Marriage's true ends

There is every likelihood that Hawaii's Supreme Court will soon overturn that state's prohibition on same-sex marriage. The court's reasoning will be simple enough: Hawaii's constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, and for the state to deny the benefits of marriage to same-sex couples without demonstrating a "compelling state interest" does precisely that. Should Hawaii license same-sex marriage, other states may be bound to recognize those marriages under the Full Faith and Credit clause of the Constitution. The U. S. Supreme Court, it seems certain, will eventually be asked to rule on the constitutionality of the heterosexual exclusivity of marriage.

For the state to license same-sex unions will entail a fundamental reappraisal of the nature of marriage and the balance struck between rights of individual self-determination and the integrity of basic social institutions such as the family. American society has much to gain from a fair-minded debate about such questions, and much to lose if we retreat further from reasoning together about the nature and aims of our common life.

Whether there are compelling enough reasons to preserve the heterosexual exclusivity of marriage is a question that arises in the wake of profound changes in how we think about sexual morality, procreation, and marriage. Historically, marriage forged a powerful connection between sexual love, procreation, and the care of children. However, contemporary understandings of marriage increasingly stress the primacy of individual self-fulfillment, not intergenerational attachments. Moreover, contraception and abortion have essentially severed any unwilled connection between sex and procreation. That connection has been further attenuated by technological advances allowing us to separate biological, gestational, and relational parenting at will. In this context, marriage's meaning seems anything but secure.

But is a further erosion of marriage's traditional linkage between sexual love and human procreation desirable? Advocates of same-sex marriage advance two arguments. First, denying same-sex couples the marriage rights enjoyed by heterosexual persons is discriminatory, an imposition of unjustified inequality. Second, same-sex marriage is presented as an embrace of, not an assault on, what is acknowledged to be a uniquely valuable social institution. If society wishes to promote the human goods of marriage—emotional fulfillment, lifelong commitment, the creation of families, and the care of children—marginalizing homosexuals by denying civil standing to their publicly committed relationships makes little sense, advocates argue.

In modern democratic societies wide latitude is given to individuals and groups pursuing often conflicting and incompatible conceptions of the good. Still, a broad tolerance and a high regard for individual autonomy cannot result in the equal embrace of every private interest or social arrangement. Economic freedom, for example, must be balanced against environmental concerns. Parents' rights to instill their own values in their children must accommodate the state's mandate to set educational standards for all children. The exclusive legal status of monog-

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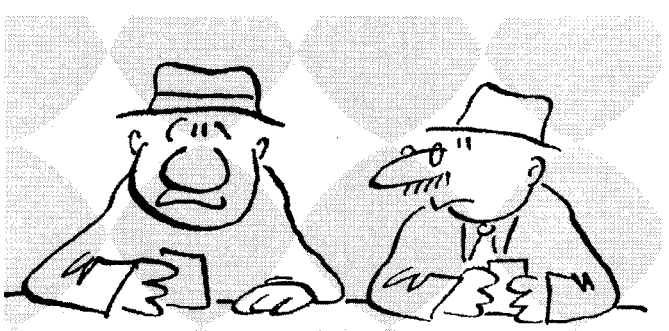
amous marriage, it is useful to remember, was once challenged by Mormon polygamy. But polygamy was judged inimical to the values of individual dignity and social comity that marriage uniquely promotes.

Now we must weigh the implicit individual and social benefits of heterosexual marriage against those of same-sex unions. In this light, advocates of same-sex marriage often argue that laws prohibiting it are analogous to miscegenation statutes. But the miscegenation analogy fails. Miscegenation laws were about racial separation, not about the nature of marriage. Legalizing same-sex unions will not remedy a self-evident injustice by broadening access to the traditional goods of marriage. Rather, same-sex marriage, like polygamy, would change the very nature and social architecture of marriage in ways that may empty it of any distinctive meaning.

Recent social history can guide us here. Proponents of no-fault divorce argued that the higher meaning of marriage, and even the health of children, would be better served in making marriage easier to dissolve. Yet the plight of today's divorced women and their children refutes such claims. In fact, the loosening of marital bonds and expectations has contributed to the devaluation and even the abandonment of the marriage ideal by many, while encouraging unrealistic expectations of marriage for many more (*see* Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, p. 18). How society defines marriage has a profound effect on how individuals think and act. And how individuals fashion their most intimate relationships has an enormous impact on the quality of our common life. The dynamic involved is subtle, but real.

Should marriage be essentially a contractual arrangement between two individuals to be defined as they see fit? Or does marriage recognize and embody larger shared meanings that cannot be lightly divorced from history, society, and nature—shared meanings and social forms that create the conditions in which individuals can achieve their own fulfillment? Popular acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation gives us some sense of the moral and social trajectory involved. Both developments were welcomed as expressions of greater honesty and even better preparations for marriage. Yet considerable evidence now suggests that these newfound "freedoms" have contributed to the instability and trivialization of marriage itself, and have not borne the promises once made for them of happier lives. Similarly, elevating same-sex unions to the same moral and legal status as marriage will further throw into doubt marriage's fundamental purposes and put at risk a social practice and moral ideal vital to all.



"I knew it wasn't going to work the minute I saw the tofu wedding cake."

The heterosexual exclusivity of marriage can be defended in the same way social policy rightly shows a preference for the formation of intact two-parent families. In both cases, a normative definition of family life is indispensable to any coherent and effective public action. Certainly, mutual love and care are to be encouraged wherever possible. But the justification and rationale for marriage as a social institution cannot rest on the goods of companionship alone. Resisting such a reductionist understanding is not merely in the interests of heterosexuals. There are profound social goods at stake in holding together the biological, relational, and procreative dimensions of human love.

"There are countless ways to 'have' a child," writes theologian Gilbert Meilaender of the social consequences and human meaning of procreation (*Body, Soul, & Bioethics*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). "Not all of them amount to doing the same thing. Not all of them will teach us to discern the equal humanity of the child as one who is not our product but, rather, the natural development of shared love, like to us in dignity....To conceive, bear, give birth to, and rear a child ought to be an affirmation and a recognition: affirmation of the good of life that we ourselves were given; recognition that this life bears its own creative power to which we should be faithful."

Is there really any doubt that in tying sexual attraction to love and love to children and the creation of families, marriage fundamentally shapes our ideas of human dignity and the nature of society? Same-sex marriage, whatever its virtues, would narrow that frame and foreshorten our perspective. Marriage, at its best, tutors us as no other experience can in the given nature of human life and the acceptance of responsibilities we have not willed or chosen. Indeed, it should tutor us in respect for the given nature of homosexuality and the dignity of homosexual persons. With this respect comes a recognition of difference—a difference with real consequences.

Still, it is frequently objected that if the state does not deny sterile or older heterosexual couples the right to marry, how can it deny that right to homosexual couples, many of whom are already rearing children?

Exceptions do not invalidate a norm or the necessity of norms. How some individuals make use of marriage, either volitionally or as the result of some incapacity, does not determine the purpose of that institution. In that context, heterosexual sterility does not contradict the meaning of marriage in the way same-sex unions would. If marriage as a social form is first a procreative bond in the sense that Meilaender outlines, then marriage necessarily presupposes sexual differentiation, for human procreation itself pre-

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supposes sexual differentiation. We are all the offspring of a man and a woman, and marriage is the necessary moral and social response to that natural human condition. Consequently, sexual differentiation, even in the absence of the capacity to procreate, conforms to marriage's larger design in a way same-sex unions cannot. For this reason sexual differentiation is marriage's defining boundary, for it is the precondition of marriage's true ends.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

A MOTHER'S DEATH

Is this what God demands?

A death in the family, especially a sudden, senseless death, plunges the heart into mourning and forces a test of faith.

Thirty hours after our family's celebration of the arrival of our son's beautiful infant daughter, her mother died. Suddenly an unsuspected embolism extinguished the life of a wonderful young woman, just as she had fulfilled her long-awaited desire to become a mother.

In one dreadful moment her family and friends moved from ecstatic joy to deepest sorrow. Together we stumbled into a future forever changed.

We came home with our son and his six-day-old infant and began to cope—one day at a time. Fortunately, the outpouring of love, support, and care from family, friends, and neighbors has been extraordinary.

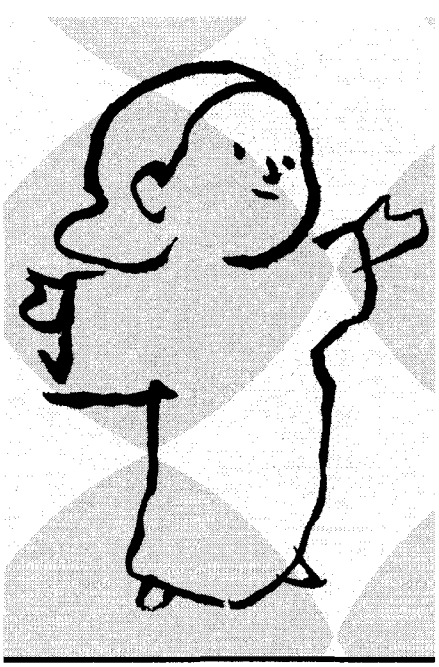
By now our family has become mobilized in a household rearranged to take care of this precious new life. The darling baby girl appears to be an angel child, sent to charm and heal us by her happy nature. No wonder parents, grandparents, relatives, and friends become besotted in their adoration. I had forgotten how completely babies deserve their royal status and how naturally they enjoy the worship of their delighted subjects.

But even as gratitude and wonder fill the air, so do the grievous questions aroused by tragic dying. Do we live on after death? Why do bad things happen to good people?

The answer to the question is settled for me. Yes, I believe with every bone in my body that Christ gives us eternal life. I can no more doubt existence of a unique resurrected identity than I can doubt my own bodily being. We go toward those we love and have lost. I also firmly believe in a just and good God's triumphant completion of creation; in the new Jerusalem, love will reign and every tear will be wiped away.

But a belief in God's gift of resurrection and eternal life does not do away with the pain of parting and the horror of absurd accidents and evil events. In the meantime, here and now, why is there so much unjust suffering and dreadful evil? How can a good, all-powerful God allow so much pain and sorrow in the creation? Job's complaint still moves us.

Our anguished cries of protest have pushed today's believers in new theological directions. At this point I can no longer accept the idea that there is some hidden divine plan or blueprint in which evil events are foreordained and/or knowingly sent to us for some greater spiritual good. True, human suffering seems to deepen character and make most persons more empathetic and wise. And yes, rising to the challenge of suffering in a courageous way can give meaning and dignity to life—after the fact. But what of those who are crushed, diminished, and destroyed by suffering? And can the lessons learned by those who learn them really be worth the price?



Moreover, the evil we experience can hardly be accounted for by humankind's freely willed choices or even by the potent social structures of sin which exercise abusive power in every society. Alas, there are too many random chance events beyond any human action that eventuate in too many senseless tragedies that appear bereft of any meaning.

If God is a good God of mercy and loving kindness, then somehow God must have become helpless to intervene and order this world and space-time we inhabit. At least an older view of a fallen world in thrall to Satan and evil powers provided some explanation. But while I have ritually in my baptismal vows time and again "rejected Satan," I have never actually wondered whether this mythical personification might be a way of symbolically conveying to us that the universe is fallen and deeply awry. I've wondered whether scientific talk of alternate universes or prior creations, or other dimensions of time and space within black holes, could mean that the evil we experience here may be some form of toxic leakage from some other disordered reality. We can no longer believe in Miltonic depictions of rebellious angels at war in heaven, but perhaps there has been some other disastrous "fall."

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Yet optimists propose a sunnier vision in which evil is viewed as an element inherent in a dynamic evolving creation, or as part of those groaning pangs of birth described by Saint Paul. Here God is the primary cause of all and is a Creator who creates and sustains the secondary causes of nature—which must be invested with their own inviolable integrity. Such a Creator cannot contravene the workings of creation. Random chance, along with lawfulness, are the secondary causes needed to allow spontaneity, flexibility, evolution, and most importantly, real human freedom and creativity. So God's self-limitation of omnipotence is a free and voluntary act of love.

In this theological picture God has emptied Godself into the processes of the universe and through the Spirit of Love empowers and consistently urges and lures the whole toward fullness of life. As Elizabeth A. Johnson expresses it, "Indwelling the world with the power of providential love, the gracious mystery of God is involved in suffering with the beloved creation as new life is created through death. Not the monarch but the lover becomes the paradigm" ("Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *Theological Studies*, March 1996).

Surely, Johnson continues, we can resonate to the idea of a loving, risk-taking creator God as "the master theatrical improvisor in live performance," who is "everywhere present and active, continuously interacting with the world to implement divine purpose while granting creatures and created systems a full measure of being and efficacy." This dynamic, evolving vision of divine providence creatively working through chance is preferable to viewing God as One who implacably sends suffering and special crosses with our names on them.

Yet in these new theological visions inspired by the new science and process theology there's still something missing. The blood of the Lamb perhaps? Doesn't this account airbrush from the picture the horrible reality of the excruciating and excessive disasters human beings suffer? I don't know. In a dark time, I'm at a loss. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

FACE IT, WE'VE LOST

Catholics in an alien culture

Even when the signs are right under our noses, clamoring for our attention, most of us don't like to admit we are in grave trouble. For to admit this would be to recognize that life can no longer go on as usual. And while life as usual may not be the most pleasant thing in the world, at least it is something we have grown used to. This is the condition known to pop psychology as denial.

Thus many people refuse to recognize that their kids are on drugs, their spouses are cheating, their bosses are ready to fire them, they have developed a grave illness, etc.

American Catholicism is like that. It has long been in a state of denial as to how hostile the dominant culture has become in this country; for if it faces facts it will be forced to make a radical change in its way of living. Not all Catholics are in denial, of course, but the average Catholic is; and this includes many priests and bishops.

Life for the Catholic church in the United States hasn't been terribly pleasant for the past thirty years. Externally we have been surrounded by a culture that is increasingly permissive and antireligious. Internally we have been faced with lower rates of Mass attendance, a diminishing number of priests and nuns, and the shrinkage of Catholic schools, not to mention a series of grave sexual scandals.

Unsatisfactory as this condition may be, we have grown used to it. (For instance, I myself hardly wince nowadays when I hear about one more accused priest.) The painful adjustments we had to go through to get to this point were bad enough. Who has the stomach for another set of painful adjustments, even if someone can promise us we'll be better off once the agony of readjustment is finished?

Besides, Catholicism is what the sociologists call a religion of the "church" type, not of the "sect" type, which means it doesn't draw sharp lines between it-

"Sometimes I wish it had killed me outright"

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self and the "world," doesn't like doing battle with the dominant culture. Of course it can fight when driven into a corner, as it did (to its glory) in Communist Poland. But it prefers accommodation or, if not exactly accommodation, then at least biding its time, as it did (to its disgrace) in Nazi Germany. Jehovah's Witnesses find it easy to reject the secular world; Catholics find it terribly hard.

Therefore we tend to tell ourselves that things, while they could be better, are not so bad. In other words, we deny.

But the times are bad indeed, and they'll probably grow worse. A generation ago the command posts of American culture (press, entertainment industry, universities) were hijacked by the forces of secularism. By "the forces of secularism" I mean those who have no religious convictions (except, of course, the conviction that religion is a waste of time) and precious few moral convictions (except the deeply held conviction that we must do our own thing and be quite nonjudgmental about others who do their own thing). Over the last three decades they have created a public culture profoundly inimical to Christianity, pushing religion toward the margins of society, where it is allowed to survive as a "private" matter.

No matter how little Catholics may like this new American culture, we cannot escape its influence. It is the way of life in which we live and move and have our being. Worse, it is the culture in which our children and grandchildren grow up. They breathe it in every day of the week, a kind of second-hand philosophical smoke that pollutes heart and mind. Defenders of junk TV remind us that television sets come equipped with an "off" button. Unfortunately, the culture does not have an "off" button; it remains always turned on. Parents may try to protect their children against America's increasingly anti-Christian way of life, but their capacity to protect is very limited. They lock the doors, but the thing gets in through windows and chimneys.

For more than twenty years the legal tolerance of virtually unlimited abortion has stood as a clear sign—indeed a great big flashing billboard with bells and whistles—that the dominant culture is the enemy of our religious beliefs. Yet for a long time most Catholics (myself included) didn't know how to read the sign, and a lot still don't. We agreed (at least many of us did) that the constitutionalization of abortion was quite a bad thing; but we regarded this as an aberration, an exception to the rule. At heart, we told ourselves, America is sound; the abortion regime is untypical, a deviation from the yellow brick road that the nation normally follows.

For those Catholics who have hitherto been unable to read the signs of the times, perhaps certain current developments will serve as a wake-up call. In early March the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit declared assisted suicide to be a fundamental constitutional right. In early April the Appeals Court of the Second Circuit rejected as unconstitutional a New York law banning assisted suicide. Any day now Hawaii, either through its Supreme Court or its legislature (acting under threat from the Court), is expected to legalize homosexual marriage. When Hawaii does this, the other forty-nine states may be obliged to recognize gay marriages made in Hawaii. And all this in a nation in which constitutional rights are seen as moral rights.

And so our children and grandchildren—whom we had hoped to see grow up Catholic, or if not Catholic then at least Christian, or if not Christian then at least with a grasp of the basic principles of natural morality—will find themselves bombarded by the messages of a dominant culture which tells them that abortion is morally OK, that suicide is morally OK, that homosexual (plus bisexual) conduct is morally OK, and that the old-fashioned definition of marriage (a lifelong partnership between man and woman, chiefly for the purpose of begetting and raising children) has been consigned to the scrapheap of useless antiquities. And if all this is so, what else must also be so?

It is becoming harder and harder to remain in denial. □

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CATCHING THE HEART OFF GUARD

The generous vision of Seamus Heaney

Suzanne Keen

Seamus Heaney in the college cafeteria line at Harvard: The woman serving holds her scoop aloft. "Pasta or potatoes?" she asks. "Surely, you're joking," says Heaney, and pokes his plate under the sneeze-guard for the potatoes.

In "Digging," the best-known poem of his first book, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), Heaney declares his distance from men like his father and grandfather, men who "could handle a spade" and "scatter new potatoes," choosing instead to follow the poet's vocation: "Between my finger and my thumb/The squat pen rests./I'll dig with it." His successes have carried him far from the Northern Ireland of his childhood, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for part of each year, to Oxford University where he was elected to the post of Professor of Poetry (1989-94), and last year to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize in Literature. (I am sure I am not the only *Commonweal* reader who cheered at that news!) But the objects, places, literature, history, and contemporary situation of Ireland remain the poet's home turf.

Justly celebrated as one of the finest poets writing in the English language, Heaney manages with unusual grace the incredibly difficult balancing act required of an international literary figure who simply must find the privacy required for writing. When I was studying at Harvard, people often wrung their hands on behalf of Seamus, as everyone familiarly calls him, even as they counted on him to appear at their colloquia and readings and parties, to remember their names, and (always) to charm. "Can it be good for his poetry?" ran the fretting refrain from this camp, even as others outside the academy expected "Famous Seamus," as they snipingly named him, to spend every waking moment promoting other Irish poets. (He is, indeed, the best known of an outstanding cohort, and not the only heir to Ireland's rich literary tradition.)

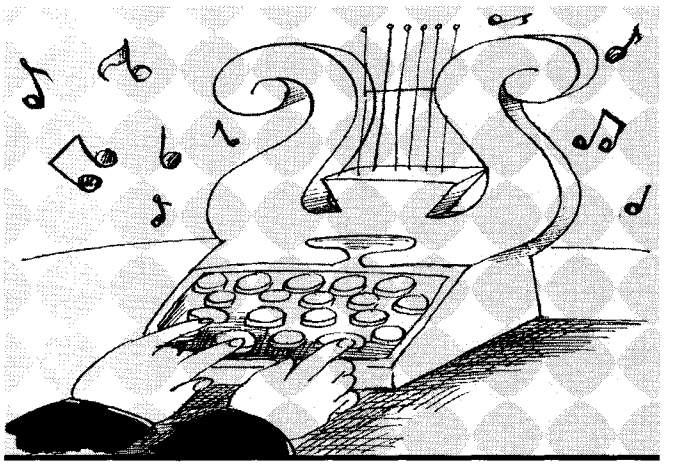
Remarkably, Heaney has more than a little of what everyone wants from him, as teacher, cultural ambassador, lecturer, poet. Many others put in positions like Heaney's take refuge in a cover of irascible or absent-minded behavior (and who can blame them?) in order to protect themselves from demands on their time. Heaney's generosity and graciousness pervade all aspects of his public existence, and he is an especially fine teacher of poetry. If you have ever heard him read his poetry aloud, or sought a signature for one of his books, you will know what I mean when I say that he has the gift of creating a feeling of intimacy, as if something particular and valuable has opened up and changed hands between you. This is, of course, the effect of reading a great lyric poem, the thing that makes us feel that we have received a glimpse of something especially true, or a valuable piece of advice about how to move through the world:

Postscript

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

(from *The Spirit Level*, 1996)

I love the last sentence of this poem, spilling over three-and-a-half lines back toward the road and the heart, moving from the "earthed lightning" of Heaney's swans (so different from the abstract broken patterns made by Yeats's airborne "Wild Swans at Coole") to the place where the poet



Suzanne Keen, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, teaches English at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.* *Seamus Heaney's poetry is reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*

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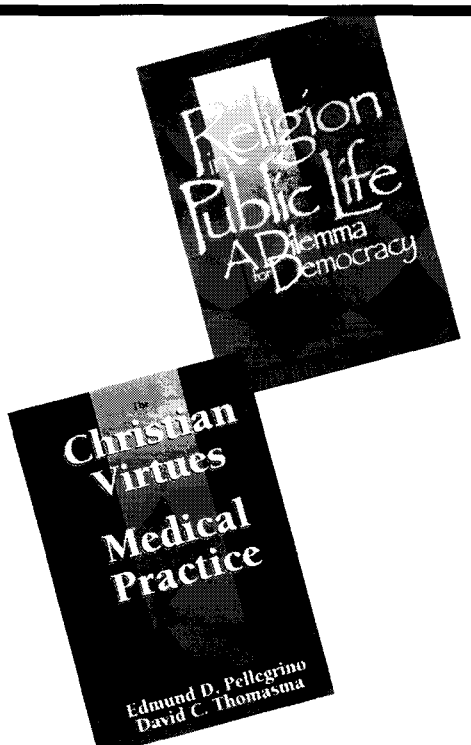
and reader share the in-betweenness, motion, and vulnerability to the "big soft buffetings" of wind and wings.

You don't have to be Leda set upon by a god, Heaney's poem tells us, to have your heart caught off guard and blown open. Making "a hurry" the metaphor for the way we live exonerates us for not parking and capturing the scene "more thoroughly." We are not blamed for being tourists or city-folk in our car, on Yeats's alienating "roadway, or on the pavements grey" ("The Lake Isle of Innisfree"). At the same time, of course, we needn't stop to "capture" the swans on the lake because the poet has caught them for us, down to their "headstrong-looking heads," in all the possible positions above and below the water. In this nearly allegorical and completely accessible landscape, "known and strange things pass" through us because we are in motion, because we "are neither here nor there." Look at what you see now, and to what it opens in you immediately, the poem instructs, rather than treating the sight of the natural world as something to be stored up like Wordsworth's memories of landscapes, hoarded tranquilizers for treating future afflictions and alienation. You can have it now as long as you are willing to be caught off-guard by the marvellous. As Heaney's recent poetry has more and more frequently attested, there is "space in his reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous" ("Crediting Poetry"), or, as he puts it in the introduction to *The Redress of Poetry* (1995), for "poems and parables about crossing from the domain of the matter-of-fact into the domain of the imagined."

In his 1991 volume of poems, *Seeing Things*, Heaney describes such a close encounter with the marvelous, in the sequence "Lightenings":

> The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
> Were all at prayers inside the oratory
> A ship appeared above them in the air.
>
> The anchor dragged along behind so deep
> It hooked itself into the altar rails
> And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,
>
> A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
> And struggled to release it. But in vain.
> 'This man can't bear our life here and will drown,'
>
> The abbot said, 'unless we help him.' So
> They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed
> back
> Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

In this vision proximate and tangible world and otherworld overlap, but the elements themselves, air and water, cannot be translated. The abbot wisely sees that the crewman must be helped back into his own "real" world up there in the air, and that the monks must not attempt to capture or arrest the materials of the vision, except in the words of the annals and the poem. The crewman and monks reach into the region uncannily shared by their world and the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Sources discussed in this essay

The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes
Noonday Press, $10, 81 pp.

The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose 1978-87
Noonday Press, $8.95, 170 pp.

The Haw Lantern
Noonday Press, $9, 52 pp.

"The Nobel Lecture: Crediting Poetry"
The New Republic, (December 25, 1995).

The Redress of Poetry
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $22, 212 pp.

Seamus Heaney Reads His Own Poems and Poems of Dunbar, Wyatt, Raleigh, Shakespeare, Marvell, Blake, Wordsworth, Hardy, and Yeats
Stratis Haviaras and Michael Milburn, general editors. Poetry Room, Harvard College Library, $24, 2 cassettes.

Seeing Things
Noonday Press, $8, 107 pp.

Selected Poems: 1966-87
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $15, 273 pp.

The Spirit Level
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, forthcoming in 1996, $18, 71 pp. Special edition with audiocassette of the author reading, $30.

otherworld, a boundary-zone in which air and water are at once "known and strange," while the swans of "Postscript" move comfortably on either side of the boundary between air and water, and help us to imagine the next step in the experience of in-betweenness: hearts open, off-guard, and blown through by the same elements that make the ocean wild and light the slate-grey lake. Though he will not reassure us about where we are when we are passed through and passing by, Heaney generously invites us along to share his revisiting and reinventing of air, light, water, swans.

This is not a solitary's journey. The fact that we can overhear a conversation with Yeats in this poem from the forthcoming volume *The Spirit Level* reminds us that the intimacy of the lyric poem comes not only from the gesture of speaker to reader, but from being allowed in, temporarily, to the poet's library. We hear what he has read, and how he reads and (as Harold Bloom would show us) misreads it. Strong poets, according to Bloom, misread one another in order to clear imaginative space for themselves and their own work. While it seems to me that Heaney employs in his poetry only the cagey and crafted sort of allusion, I know no more creative and critical a misquoter of others' lines than Seamus Heaney the teacher. Listening to him lecture on twentieth-century British and Irish poets, I have heard him inadvertently improve lines of Ted Hughes, Philip Larkin, Geoffrey Hill, and W. B. Yeats, among many others.

Introducing the late James Merrill, author of *The Changing Light at Sandover*, Heaney emended the title of this magnificent book to *The Shifting Light at Sandover*. Merrill cringed, but shifting light...not bad! Of course, anyone who learns by heart a vast amount of poetry and recites from memory will occasionally misplace or elide a word, and I know few poets who wouldn't be willing to risk misquotation to have Heaney think of their work what he feels about a poem by Thomas Wyatt: "I often say it just for the sheer elation of the poem itself."

A memorable performer of his own poems, Heaney carries on the important tradition of reading aloud. The Harvard Poetry Room at Lamont Library has made available a tape of Heaney reading not only his own work, but poems by the fifteenth-century Scots poet Dunbar, by Thomas Wyatt, Walter Raleigh, William Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, and W. B. Yeats. Only two, Yeats and Hardy, lived into the age of sound recordings, so we have no "authentic" voice to confute the versions we hear in our heads. (For those who have not had the opportunity to hear Heaney's voice, I'm pleased to say that Farrar, Straus and Giroux is issuing *The Spirit Level* in a special edition with an audiotape of the poet reading.) Interspersed with anecdotes about those who introduced him to the poems, and with brief comments on why and how they are meaningful to Heaney, the Poetry Room tape captures some of what makes Seamus Heaney such a wonderful teacher. His reading of Walter Raleigh's admonitory poem to his son, the "pretty knave" of the sonnet, is worth the price of the two cassettes:

Three things there be that prosper up apace
And flourish, whilst they grow asunder far,
But on a day, they meet all in one place,
And when they meet, they one another mar;
And they be these: the wood, the weed, the wag.
The wood is that which makes the gallow tree;
The weed is that which strings the hangman's bag;
The wag, my pretty knave, betokeneth thee.
Mark well, dear boy, whilst these assemble not,
Green springs the tree, hemp grows, the wag is wild,
But when they meet, it makes the timber rot;
It frets the halter, and it chokes the child.
Then bless thee, and beware, and let us pray
We part not with thee at this meeting day.

Though I know that Raleigh's Elizabethan English was a different accent entirely, I hear this lyric now in Heaney's voice. Perhaps coincidentally, this sonnet was also one of Robert Frost's favorites to recite, and Frost, like Heaney, honored the discipline of formal verse, even as he took the line in the direction of the colloquial. Frost famously commented that writing without form was like playing tennis with the net down. Heaney's metaphor takes us back to his scene of the monks in the oratory at Clonmacnoise: "Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and

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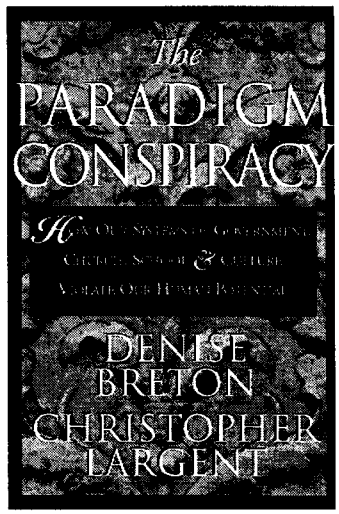
HAVE OUR SOCIAL SYSTEMS BETRAYED US?



In a society that measures worth according to dollars, deals, and productivity, we seem to live from crisis to crisis, using hard-nosed business practices, tougher law enforcement and even confinement and surveillance in our schools to keep our social systems working. What's going on? Why are our systems working so hard to punish us instead of performing their rightful functions of educating, nurturing and promoting the public good? According to this provocative new book, addictive processes permeate every social system we use from schools and churches to workplaces and government and are making us sick and unhealthy. *The Paradigm Conspiracy* explains why our systems have failed us and how they can be transformed through a dramatic paradigm shift toward fairness, integrity, and responsibility.

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a holding, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and centripetal in mind and body" ("Crediting Poetry"). In this version of the story, no abbot intervenes to free the ship, for the crewman descending the rope must be the poet, adjusting the tension between the captured craft and the anchor, and entering the marvelous as he goes.

As the Nobel prize reminds us, Heaney's sojourns in the academy have not impeded his true work. In the past decade he has published three superb volumes of poetry: *The Haw Lantern* (1987), containing the breathtaking sonnet sequence "Clearances"; *Seeing Things* (1991), reviewed in *Commonweal* (February 26, 1993); and the aforementioned new collection, *The Spirit Level*. In addition, *The Government of the Tongue: Selected Prose 1978–87* appeared in 1988, a play, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes*, in 1991, and the lectures Heaney delivered during his tenure as Professor of Poetry at Oxford came out last year as the collection *The Redress of Poetry*. His moving Nobel lecture, "Crediting Poetry," published in the *New Republic* (December 25, 1995), should not be omitted, for here Heaney articulates the credo of his vocation: "I credit poetry," he says, "both for being itself and for being a help, for making possible a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind's center and its circumference....I credit it because credit is due to it, in our time and in all time, for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase."

Being true to life means more than giving "a print-out of the given circumstances of time and place," as Heaney says in his essay on Yeats and Larkin in *The Redress of Poetry*, for poetry must be a help, must restore and transform, "in order that human beings bring about the most radiant conditions for themselves to inhabit." Though we may wonder how poetry can accomplish this urgent work, we can at least applaud the generosity of the vision. And some time make the time to drive out west into County Clare. □

NOT ALL BOOKS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Orwell & his animals at fifty

Katharine Byrne

Although he was a respected novelist and journalist in England during the '30s and early '40s, George Orwell (1903–50) had a hard time getting *Animal Farm* into print. He finished it in 1944 and sent or carried it from one publisher to another, but no one would take it. World War II was in progress. Russia was our ally and Britain's. A book that satirized the betrayal of Russia's revolution by its leaders was regarded, at the very least, as an affront to a friend. Moreover, an American publisher told him you just can't sell an animal story to adults.

Not until the end of the war in 1945 and the customary reshuffling of friends and enemies was a publisher willing to invest enough precious paper to produce 450 copies. These were sold out within weeks. The Queen dispatched an emissary to her bookseller-by-appointment, but his shelves were bare; an anarchist book shop offered the Queen a complimentary copy. The book has never been out of print since then, read by millions in dozens of languages. Nineteen ninety-six marks its fiftieth anniversary of publication in the United States.

If you were in high school at any time since the 1950s, you probably read *Animal Farm*, a story of the revolt of Farmer Jones's livestock against their brutal, drunken owner. The venerable boar, Old Major, is the philosopher of the revolution. His ringing words to the clandestine assemblage of animals remind them that their lives are "miserable, laborious, and short," with no share in the fruits of their labor. While ascribing all their troubles to "man," his speech ends with the warning: "Above all, no animal must ever tyrannize over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. All animals are equal."

The barnyard is roused to revolution. Led by the pigs, the animals rout Jones and take possession; "Jones's Manor" is now called "Animal Farm." Morale is high. Victory is sweet for the liberated animals but also brief. At first they gambol in joy at the prospect of living out their lives in dignity, sharing in the prosperity their labor produces. Each works hard to sustain the revolution.

But then, inexorably, methodically, equality and freedom are stripped away as the pigs, under Napoleon, a ruler as brutal as Jones was, develop a ruling elite that abrogates all privilege to itself at the expense of the "lower" animals. (The wily pigs explain that they really don't like the milk that they refuse to share with the other animals; they drink it only to keep up their strength so that they can pursue the welfare of all.)

Lies and terror now rule "Animal Farm." In the ultimate

Katharine Byrne *taught an Orwell course for many years at Mundelein College/Loyola University in Chicago.*

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Changing Witness

Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994

MICHAEL WARNER

Foreword by George Weigel

Historian MICHAEL WARNER traces the development of the social teachings of America's Catholic bishops from World War I to the present and shows how papal teaching, the reception of the Second Vatican Council, the upheavals in American morals, mores, and politics, and the bureaucratic evolution of the bishops' conference all contribute to a "changing witness" in the volatile years between 1917 and 1994.

How successfully have the American bishops translated Scripture and the Church's social doctrine into the American context? Have the bishops articulated a coherent, persuasive public philosophy as a foundation for their social activism? Is the Church today speaking to public life as the Church, or as another partisan player in the political game? Probing for answers to these vital questions, Warner detects a profound paradigm shift at work, as the bishops gradually abandoned their traditional analytic framework in favor of a generally liberal reading of the "signs of the times."

Michael Warner is a historian who since 1992 has worked with the history staff of the Central Intelligence Agency. Before that he served as an analyst in the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence. He is the editor of *The CIA under Harry Truman* and holds a doctorate in history from the University of Chicago. George Weigel is the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

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reversal of Old Major's words, "all animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others." One form of repression has been replaced by another. In the end, the wretched animals are looking in the window at an economic summit between Men and Pigs, "Looking from pig to man, and from man to pig they observe that there is no difference between them."

John Halas and Joy Batchelor, in their animated cartoon film of the book (1954), apparently could not bear this ending. In their version of the book, "the animals, united, came on relentlessly" and a brick was thrown through the window, "shattering Napoleon's magnificent portrait under the impact of yet another revolution." Understandably, students like this version better than the original.

But as Orwell tells it, the fable ends with all the brave hopes in ruins. Virtue is crushed and wickedness triumphs. What went wrong? Orwell lays out the story and asks us to look at it. He does not moralize. This is what happened, but we know it is not right. We are left morally indignant at the injustice suffered. Are we to believe that this is the inevitable fate of rebellion? Or that other political systems are better than Stalinist communism?

As to that, Orwell does not uphold the political systems of the West. The men who come to deal with the ruling pigs, Pilkington from capitalist England and Frederick from Nazi Germany, commiserate with the pigs: "You have your lower animals and we have our lower classes." From his earliest years as a policeman for the British Empire in Burma—an "unsuitable career," he called it—Orwell always spoke out against oppressors of the poor and helpless: returning to England he spoke for the rights of tramps, hop-pickers, or coal miners.

A self-defined democratic Socialist, Orwell had a hard time with other members of the Left. An episode in Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* describes the situation succinctly. Addressing a Columbia University seminar, Mr. Sammler is attempting to defend Orwell's position, but he is interrupted by one of the bearded and unwashed students with "Orwell was a counter-revolutionary shit, and you're an old shit too." With this declaration, the meeting is ingloriously ended.

Maligned by the Left, Orwell has often been appropriated by the Right. In the flurry of interest that coincided with the year 1984, Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*, claimed that Orwell would, if he had lived, subscribe to the conservative magazine and to the principles of its editor. In fact, *Animal Farm* had earlier entered the canon of required reading in most high schools for some of the wrong reasons, its author would say—and he did say so.

Orwell was distressed to find his *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being used, especially in the United States, as cold-war weapons, purportedly the work of a repentant Communist who saw the light and wanted to warn the world of the inevitable fruits of revolution. When he saw the issue of Henry Luce's *Life* magazine expounding this idea, Orwell insisted that he had not written a book against Stalinism to deny the right of revolt by oppressed people, nor to advance American foreign policy. "My books," he said, "are about the perversions that any centralized economy is liable to."

In a letter to Dwight Macdonald, editor of *Politics*, Orwell further explained, "Revolutions led by power-hungry people can only lead to a change of masters....Revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job....You can't have a revolution unless you make it for your self; there is no such thing as a benevolent dictatorship."

Should *Animal Farm* be read during the next fifty years? Of course, but for the right reasons: setting up as it does, with crystal clarity, the price paid when we do not safeguard our freedoms. The hard-working wretches of the world contribute to their own fate in their ignorant loyalty and apathy. In the book, the huge cart-horse, Boxer, a faithful, unquestioning worker ("I will get up earlier; I will work harder...Napoleon is always right") is sent to the knackers as soon as his usefulness is over. As he is carried off to his death, the weak protest of his hooves against the side of the van sounds the dying hope of the animals betrayed. The tendency of power to corrupt must always be recognized; people's hold over their own fate must prevail: an alert, informed, and wary electorate.

Is *Animal Farm* out of date since the Soviet Socialist Republics, as constituted, have failed? Only if it is read for the wrong reasons. The tale about independence won but lost continues to remind us that freedom is fragile and precious. Power corrupts, and there are forces at work seeking to wield it.

I have spoken to ten or twelve English teachers, from Highland Park, Illinois, to Highland Park in Dallas, Texas, about the continuing relevance of *Animal Farm*. I was glad to hear one of them say, "I'd hate to lose it as required reading. It is such a great story, told with precious touches of humor." Another added, "It's a rare classic that students really enjoy." A thoughtful teacher told me, "The book is talking about any concentration of power. Last year a bright student suggested that 'the story warns us not to fight for our rights as students and then let class officers impose their ideas on the rest of us.'"

After a lecture, Bernard Crick, one of Orwell's biographers, was asked by a listener, "If Orwell were alive today, what would he be?" Crick's answer sidestepped the questioner's effort to pull Orwell politically to the right or to the left and put a tag on him. "If Orwell were alive today," Crick said, "he would be a very old man; he would probably be counting the marbles in his head and hoping they were all there." Indeed, if Orwell were alive and well and had all his marbles he would be fighting as he did all the days of his brief life, writing against oppression and corruption wherever it exists, glad to know that the young are still reading and learning from *Animal Farm*. □

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Final payment

The Shadow Man
Mary Gordon
Random House, $24, 282 pp.

Sara Maitland

Mary Gordon has a well established record as a novelist deeply shaped by, although rather at odds with, her Roman Catholicism. I admire her work, and particularly *Final Payments*. So I came to this autobiographical memoir with some enthusiasm, though also with some doubts, as I have difficulties with books in the confessional genre by novelists. However, even uneasy amalgams can be interesting, and I was interested.

I was also feeling indirectly involved. Gordon writes of the death of her father when she was seven as the most important event of her life. My brother died last year leaving two small children, the older of whom is just seven. My family has talked a great deal about how one supports the children in preserving useful memories of their father, so I was open to a deeper understanding of loss and the way death complicates memory, knowledge, anger, and love.

I have spelled my position out in more detail than I might normally do, because I want to be fair to Gordon, but I have to say that *The Shadow Man* is quite simply a bad book. Nearly forty years after he died Gordon set out "in search" of her lost father, and the book is a record of the search. It ends up being more about Gordon's sensitivities than a biography of another person, but she was laboring under a particular difficulty—everything that she found out is pretty nasty. Her father was a liar (in large and small), a pornographer, a Jewish anti-Semite, a crypto-Nazi, and a grossly irresponsible husband.

It must be hard to discover all that about one's beloved father; and it was made more difficult still for Gordon because at the same time she was turning her attention to the task, her mother was collapsing into Alzheimer's disease, unable to offer more domestic balancing memories to her daughter. But "hard" is not, from the reader's point of view, enough of an excuse. I hope that were I to start out on such a project and found what Gordon found, I would sensibly abandon it, or fictionalize it, or not publish it. Instead the whole thing seems to have rotted Gordon's writerly intelligence (which she certainly has). The book is not simply ill-conceived, it is badly structured, sloppily written, and deplorably self-indulgent.

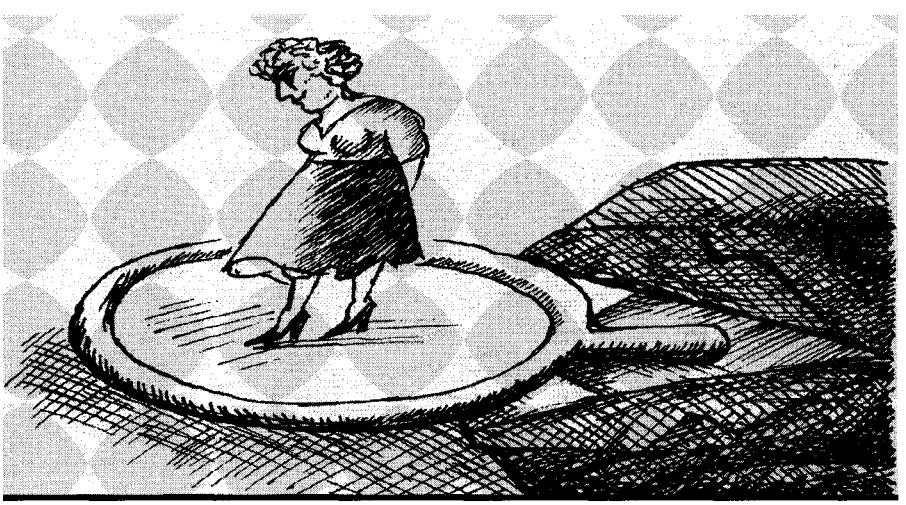
The best example of these qualities is the bizarre stylistic flourishes that adorn the book: I cannot find a single page which is not littered with preposterous rhetorical questions. Here is Gordon on the subject of her father's false teeth:

> But were the teeth his? Yes, of course, since he had bought them. Did he pay for them, or did my mother, or some anonymous benefactor with a taste for Orthodox Catholicism, literature with a fascist bite? But the teeth weren't his in that they didn't emanate from his body. They weren't flesh of his flesh as I was. So it is possible to say that I was his daughter but they were not his teeth. Then whose teeth were they?

This self-dramatizing quality might be justified in relation to her memories, but it continues into the period of her "search," all of which is unfortunately written in the present tense—giving a gushing flow, but undercutting any self-critical possibility.

> But I went to a place where I was not the only one [the public archives office]...who are all these people and how could I be one of them? What are they looking for? What is the evidence they need? Are they trying to find lost kin....Or maybe someone with money, the money that can change their lives?

At the root of the book's failure is the fact that I simply cannot believe in the seven-year-old self whom Gordon remembers and describes—a seven-year-old whose beloved father has just died



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and who lies in bed and thinks

> I had to allow for the possibility that I might be only an idea—but in the mind of whom? Or what? Not God certainly. I knew it wasn't God; at that moment God was only one more instance of failed language.

(I don't think so. And this from the creator of the young girl in *The Company of Women*—we know Gordon knows better.)

Because she does not give us a credible child it is increasingly hard to believe in the sincerity, or even emotional capability, of the grown woman who is now the narrator. This is a double shame because it also undermines the potentially most interesting part of the book, when she turns her attention from this maudlin drivel to an exploration of her mother, her mother's retreat into amnesia, and the struggle Gordon therefore has in establishing the possibility of exhuming her father and reburying him. It has become, regrettably, almost impossible to believe anything she says.

The difficulty is enhanced, I would have to add, by some most peculiar lapses of taste: name-dropping the fact that Toni Morrison recommended the hotel in which Gordon stayed in Lorain, or telling us that she gave her children *French* bread with their omelet the day of her father's reburial.

I think I feel a sincere pity for Gordon wrestling with what is obviously a devastating experience, but I feel as sorry for the reader having to read it in this form. At one point she exclaims

> Am I one of those modern people who don't know the difference between the public and the private? One of those people on "Oprah" or "Geraldo," one of those transsexual doctors or dominatrix twins who can't wait to tell their tales? Am I squandering my legacy by putting it out in the open, on the trail, where it can be consumed like Hansel and Gretel's crumbs, by passersby?

The answer is "Yes you are." □

Sara Maitland *is the author, most recently, of* A Big-Enough God *(Henry Holt).*

CAN MARRIAGE BE RESCUED?

The Vulnerable Child
What Really Hurts America's Children and What We Can Do about It
Richard Weissbourd
Addison-Wesley, $22, 280 pp.

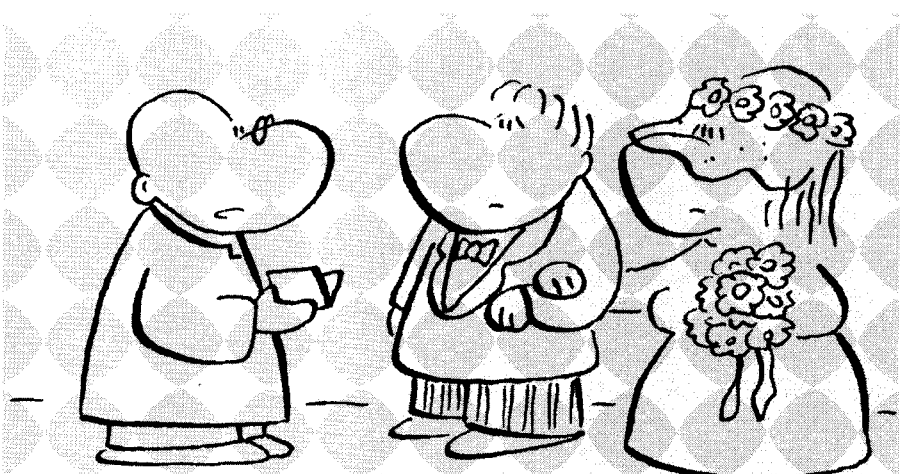
The Abolition of Marriage
How We Lost the Right to a Lasting Love
Maggie Gallagher
Regnery, $25, 265 pp.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Richard Weissbourd, a family policy expert at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, sets out to dispel the pervasive gloom and cynicism about public programs for children with some good news: there are successful programs that make a difference in children's lives, and they do not require vast sums of money or huge armies of government workers. In the second and more useful half of this book, he chronicles these successes, from community policing to neighborhood health clinics to revitalized schools. Weissbourd also offers a compelling portrait of child-serving professionals on the front lines whose daily work is to "befriend families the community wants to forget." Indeed, this book is at its best when it describes the lives of "vulnerable providers"—the public school teachers, police officers, social workers, and the foot soldiers in the ranks of child-protective services—who are called upon to make wrenching and impossible decisions, often with too little information, too little time, and too little support.

The first and more polemical half of *The Vulnerable Child* is an attack on the "ideological" debate over families which, in Weissbourd's view, simplistically attributes children's problems to single causes such as racial discrimination, poverty, unemployment, or family breakdown. All of this is beside the point, says Weissbourd; the point is that children's lives are shaped by a set of changing forces and institutions, and the task of improving children's welfare involves understanding and responding to these environmental complexities.

Yet although Weissbourd professes to offer a more complex view of children's environment, his map of the world is nonetheless highly selective and skewed



"Either you do or you don't—you can't use nolo contendere."

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toward the professional-service provider. The friendly neighborhood clinic and loving school loom large on the social landscape, while parents (especially fathers), friends, and church are faint and weak presences. For example, he describes religious conviction as a "flexible coping mechanism" and places fathers among "the various men who might be important to a child." To be sure, some children's worlds are bereft of families, fathers, and faith, and providers of professional services can play an important and helpful role. But they cannot replace the "close-in" institutions of family life, nor can they function as more than inferior substitutes. Weissbourd's argument would have been stronger if he had acknowledged this additional complexity, particularly since his own evidence suggests that professional child-serving institutions, however innovative and responsive, cannot reliably provide secure and enduring attachments for children. He notes, for example, that mentoring programs, which tie children to a "community" adult, often fail because "adults lose interest."

For Maggie Gallagher, the way to improve children's life prospects is to restore marriage as the primary social institution for bearing and raising children. Citing now-familiar statistics on high divorce rates, rising levels of unwed childbearing and cohabitation with children, and declining rates of marriage and remarriage, Gallagher sees marriage withering away, burdening children and communities with a host of problems, including increased poverty and economic insecurity, higher levels of juvenile crime and violence against women and children, and a growing loss of trust in the permanence of primary social bonds. Indeed, it is this loss of faith in marriage as a lasting union that fuels the cultural disposition to abandon married parenthood. As Gallagher explains, the reasoning is: If marriage doesn't last, why bother to get married in the first place and thus risk divorce? Why not live together or have a child "on one's own"? If Americans continue to follow this logic, she warns, marriage and child well-being will continue their downward spiral.

Gallagher is breaking new ground by introducing the subject of marriage into the debate. In the more than two decades of fierce debate over changes in the American family, attention has focused on the consequences of the breakdown of the marital institution, such as fatherlessness, divorce, and illegitimacy, while marriage itself has been almost entirely neglected. She also breaks with the established political categories in the family debate. Many people see support for marriage as a conservative position. Yet Gallagher, a researcher at the Institute for American Values, is harshly critical of conservatives, taking aim at their celebration of rugged individualists when it has been rugged married couples who have built communities and raised children. And she is unabashed in looking to an activist government for help in rehabilitating marriage, calling for preferences in public housing, job training programs, tax

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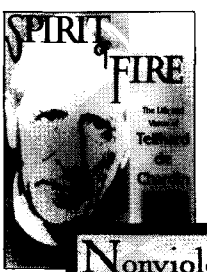

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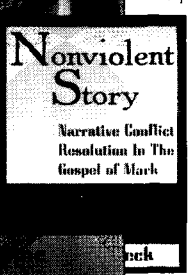

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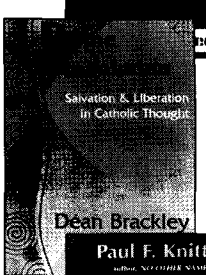

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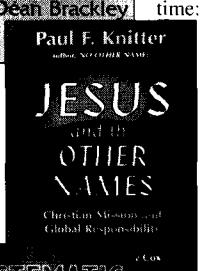

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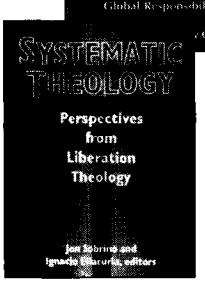

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credits, and a "marriage bonus" for low-income married couples with children.

But Gallagher is not only making an argument about the social usefulness of marriage in accomplishing the task of raising and sponsoring children into successful adulthood. Her book is also about marriage as a "good" and an end in itself, a way of reconciling the separate natures of men and women and of making possible the human aspiration toward enduring love. Indeed, without the ideal and aspiration toward marriage as a permanent bond, Gallagher explains, there cannot be lasting love between men and women, but only short-term, nonbinding, and ultimately disappointing "love connections."

It is the larger moral argument that lifts *The Abolition of Marriage* above the dreary, dead-end debate over whether it is better for unhappily married couples to stick it out in grim and loveless marriages "for the sake of the children" or to put children through the trauma of divorce. This is a classic case of false choices, suggests Gallagher, and a telling sign of how impoverished our understanding of the purposes of marriage has become. Over the past thirty years, Americans have tried to turn marriage into an institution with all the virtues of free love, and, in so doing, have lost the institution itself. As Gallagher sees it, the restoration of marriage as the primary social institution for bearing and raising children will require recapturing a vision of the undertaking as worthy for its own sake.

Yet this vision may be shaped, in part, by the rediscovery of marriage as an economic necessity. Presidential pollster Stan Greenberg recently asked the members of one of the core constituencies of the Democratic party, noncollege married men and women fifty years or younger, what they saw as the most helpful resources in uncertain economic times. Family, friends, and church ranked high on their list. Government was hardly mentioned; the same for professional service providers. □

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's The Divorce Culture *will be published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1997.*

THEN & NOW

Mississippi
An American Journey
Anthony Walton
Alfred A. Knopf, $24, 279 pp.

Robert Coles

During the early 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement in the South, even the tough-minded, daring young activists of SNCC (the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) were given pause by the state of Mississippi: it had a reputation as the final bastion of segregation, the place where a last ditch stand would occur on behalf of the racial status quo—hence the "Mississippi Summer Project" of 1964, meant to "go for the heart, go for the jugular," as some young men and women kept putting it at the time. Sometimes, cardiovascular imagery yielded to the neuropsychiatric kind, and we were told, in those "orientation sessions" which preceded the onset of the project, that Mississippi wasn't only a scene of fear and terror, but "a state of mind," or a place "where a war of nerves" was constantly being waged.

Now, of course, Mississippi is substantially different politically, and to a certain extent, socially and racially—yet its formidable notoriety and singularity persist in the memories of those old enough to have known what was: the parents, for instance, of Anthony Walton, who left the state for the North before he was born, and who, in this documentary effort, that of a family, return there with him as he tries to comprehend their past, which is also his, and ours as Americans.

Fiefdoms fall in this book—all those academic and intellectual delineations of proper terrain. The author wants us to know about a state's history and geography, its ecology, its cultural and economic past; he has us following its roads and rivers, attending its music, its literary tradition, its terrible stories of hate, betrayal, murder. He gives us his parents' experiences, and those of his kin, of their friends. He also gives us his own experiences as he moves across the state in this last decade of the twentieth century—noticing, musing, listening, engaging with various others in various locales, situations. The result is a narrative of great strength, variety, authority: social history mingling with musicology; literary criticism keeping company with political analysis; contemporary reportage giving way to moral reflection; extended passages of prose interrupted by poems, and too, by the extraordinary photographs taken by the Farm Security Administration photographer Marian Post Wolcott, which in their dramatic, telling way offer silent witness to an American colonialism all too readily available for visual scrutiny.

At times, the author gets caught in the inevitable tug between the past and present, between the South and the North. Some of his informants remember not "the good old days," but their own honorable efforts to live decent lives, no matter the hardships, the suffering—and contrast all of that with today's somewhat improved political

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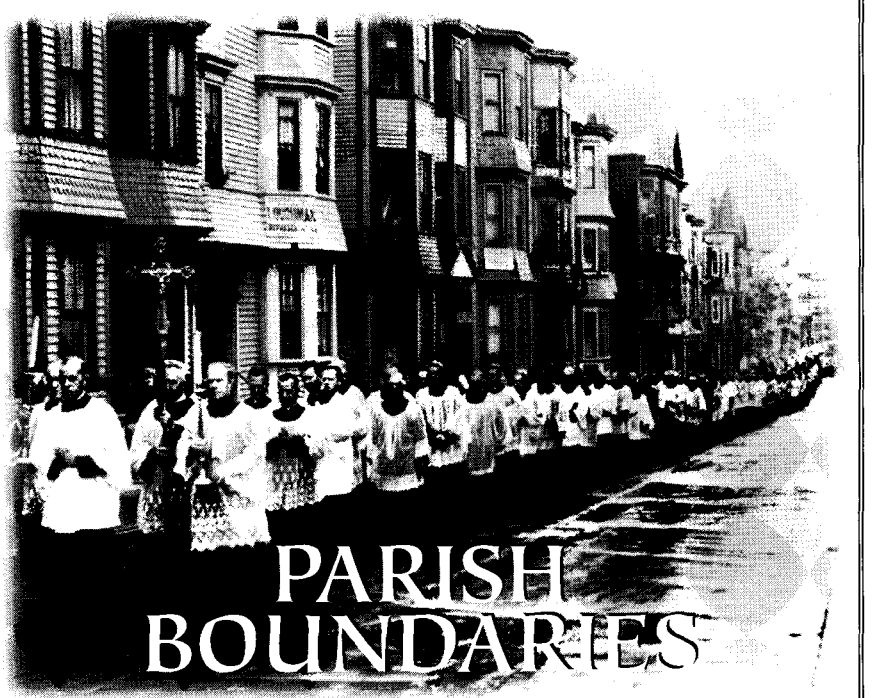
and racial and economic climate, which has not, however, prevented drugs and crime and sexual promiscuity from taking serious hold. Nor has the trek toward freedom, to Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland and the cities of the Northeast, spared former Mississippians a similar jeopardy—ghetto life, with all its threats to a people's family life, its spiritual legacy, traditions. Such ironies are put squarely before us by men and women uninterested in "resolving" (that cool, slippery word) this life's inconsistencies, paradoxes—though, the author does get told, unequivocally and over and over, that his people, his own ancestors, may have been given the rawest deal possible in this country. Still, they worked hard, prayed hard, sang hard, a tenaciously proud struggle to make do, to stand up to the constant threats, the terrible injustice imposed by a caste system whose grip was only loosened a generation ago, and then only after a strenuous fight.

Although that story is by no means over, this book is a reminder of what has recently changed. After all, the author is a man whose parents were born to the Mississippi tenant-farmer world, but who now moves with no great difficulty into all realms of that state. He is a guest in the homes of the wealthy, the socially prominent, the well-educated, even as he talks with candor to the working people of both races. His knowledge of the past, energized by his parents' experiences and recollections, can give him pause, every once in awhile, even prompt a moment of apprehension, as he makes his way across haunted, blood-drenched territory—counties where lynchings took place, where all the time one race lorded it over the other in every way possible. Yet, out of that extended time of exceptional vulnerability came a stoic dignity as well as wounds, and it is the achievement of this book that both sides of that moral as well as racial story get told.

At times, Walton's subject matter and his compelling, lyrical, ironic voice bring to mind the James Agee of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Like Agee, Walton is an author of southern ancestry who has gone back to the homeland, as it were—to explore and then assemble an account for others. Like Agee, Walton does stretch, challenge the confines of the conventional essay. He dares long takes, short riffs on a variety of subjects—places, highways, foliage, individuals. He gives us biographies of Richard Wright, Robert Johnson, Medgar Evers, Emmet Till. He tells us about cotton and school teachers the way Agee did—detailed description, fluidly and invitingly presented. He does special honor to jazz and the blues, and even, in "A Sort of Chorus," bows out of the picture altogether, so that we may meet novelists, ordinary people, musicians, poets, look at photographs, contemplate passages from our Constitution, from the Bible—let a whole history come at us from different directions, with the author a behind-the-scenes conductor of sorts.

All through this marvelously evocative book we are graced with interviews—people of all sorts and conditions "tell us how it used to be," how it goes



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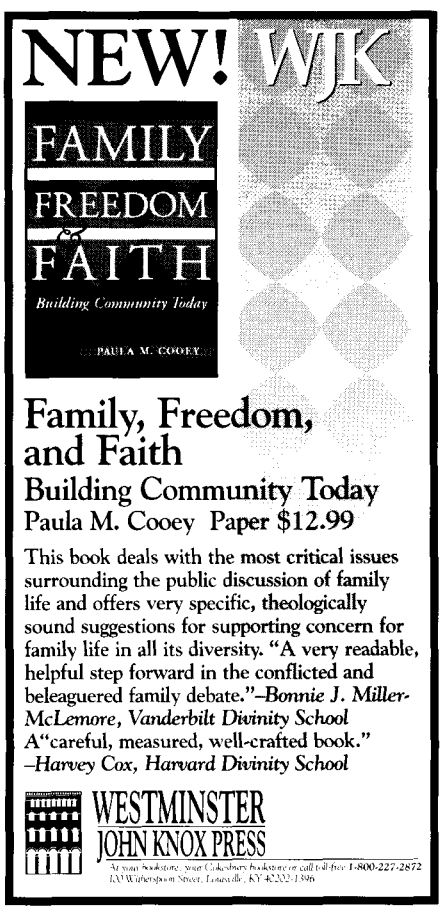
now, how they hope things will turn out in the years ahead. But it is Anthony Walton's voice that ultimately wins us over, carries us the distance he himself has traveled, carries us from places afar right to the Delta, to its melancholy music, to the back-breaking toil of the people who have lived there, to the soul-wrenching effort of so many to stay afloat morally and spiritually against such high odds. With his help we arrive at the destination he had in mind for himself, as well as us—a landscape of understanding that enables a coming-to-terms with nightmares all too commonly overlooked, refused the instructive scrutiny they deserve, demand. A book's subtitle is more than earned—a private look into a family's past becomes "An American Journey": a tale of one state's fate becomes a great moral lesson for all of us, wherever we live. □

Robert Coles *is a child psychiatrist who teaches at Harvard, and the author, most recently, of* The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism.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SEEING, DOING, SAYING THE GOOD

Integrity
Stephen L. Carter
Basic Books, $24, 224 pp.

Don Wycliff

It was Father Robert Griffin of Notre Dame, I believe, who observed some time in the mid-1970s that the Catholic church had gotten out of the business of spectacle just when spectacle was becoming big business. What inspired the observation were the post-Vatican II simplification of Catholic liturgy and ritual (gone were midnight Masses, benediction, incense, and May crownings) and the near simultaneous advent of rock concerts, light shows, and other such crowd-pleasing spectacles.

A similar observation might be made about the practice of moral self-examination. The Catholic church got out of the business of encouraging it just when our society most needed it. Or maybe our society needs it so much now because the church stopped encouraging it. In either case, the term "examination of conscience" seems to have all but disappeared from the Catholic lexicon, and the practice appears to have faded as well.

Examining one's conscience is not quite the same thing as engaging in "moral discernment," but they are at least first cousins. And both, Stephen Carter would say, are necessary to a life of integrity or, as he puts it alternatively, "the integral life." Indeed, in Carter's formulation, moral discernment is the necessary first step in living the integral life (the others being to do the right as one has discerned it, and to say forthrightly that the reason one does it is that it is morally right).

Carter has become one of our nation's most intriguing and noteworthy public intellectuals, largely because of his unerring instinct for the hot social issue of the moment and his willingness to tackle it head-on, with honesty, candor and—rare nowadays in public discourse—charity. (It also doesn't hurt that, unlike many other academics, he writes lucidly, accessibly, even elegantly.)

Integrity appears as America is in profound turmoil over our moral condition as a nation. The president and the first lady are being investigated for an assortment of vaguely defined offenses, and one of the investigations is being led by a senator who is himself—to put it charitably—of dubious integrity. The president and the Republican presidential nominee try daily to outdo each other in sounding concerned about the crisis of "values." Hollywood has lately come to heel on the issue of content ratings for television shows, responding (belatedly) to the concerns of parents and members of Congress over the effects of motion-picture violence on children. Newspapers are daily full of stories about youthful "superpredators" and the pain and death they dispense so casually in drive-by shootings and other acts of violence. And there is a general sense that all the institutions of our society—the churches, journalism, law, medicine—suffer from a lack of integrity that is corroding the foundations of our society and making it, in general, a far less happy place to be than it once was.

Carter has no easy answer to our problem, no moral equivalent of a quick injection of penicillin that will cure our illness and let us be on our merry ways. The answer is harder than that. It is, in a real sense, to be born again to lives of integrity, which means following the three steps to integral living: discern what is moral; act on the basis of that discernment; and assert forthrightly that one is acting as one does because it is morally right to do so.

The first step is the most crucial. "I begin with the proposition," writes Carter, "that every person of integrity

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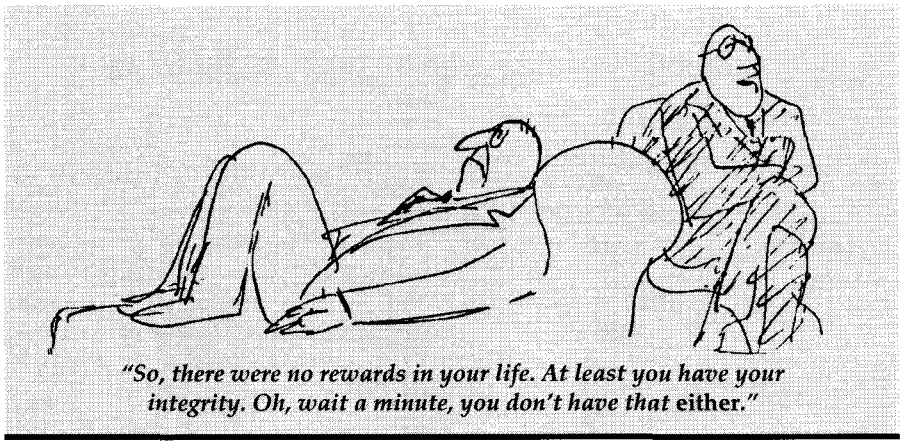
must be, by definition, a morally reflective individual." Much of our current moral affliction stems from our failure as a people to do this hard work of major discernment and, as important, to cultivate the skills and the habits of discernment in our young people. We have all—not just Catholics—gotten out of the habit of moral self-examination. Carter writes:

> We are in trouble because nobody grows up to be good by accident. One reason for the popularity of the character education movement is surely that parents understand the needs of their children for clear, firm moral instruction. It is not enough to say that it is the responsibility of the parent to teach their children right from wrong. If we are to look on our society as a community, the responsibility is a shared one: and so the lesson in right and wrong that children learn at home must be reinforced, not only in the curriculum of the public schools but by the example of adults and institutions throughout the society.

Integrity's most fascinating section—and likely the most controversial—is part 2, "Applications," seven chapters in which Carter discusses what kind of behavior integrity would dictate for those involved in several key social institutions, including one with which I am intimately familiar: journalism.

Easily the best of these discussions is that about marriage. Carter's explication of the concepts of promise and commitment is a refreshing change from the superficial—and self-serving—treatments that one most often hears nowadays.

The weakest of the discussions is—dare I say it?—of journalism. Never before in reading any of Carter's work have I felt moved to say, "This guy doesn't know what he's talking about." But that's what I felt about most of this discussion. It is patently absurd for Carter to suggest that reporters and editors routinely "make the facts fit the story rather than making the story fit the facts." It is ludicrous for him to suggest that Geraldo Rivera-type purveyors of "emotional pornography" are in any way typical of American journalists. And it is close to dishonest for a man as intelligent as Carter to use the blanket term "the media" to describe a set of institutions that range from the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times* on the one hand to the *National Enquirer* and the "Jerry Springer Show" on the other.



***"So, there were no rewards in your life. At least you have your integrity. Oh, wait a minute, you don't have that* either."**

The worst thing about Carter's errors here is that they trivialize an important issue. There are real sins in American journalism. Carter comes to one of the gravest only at the end of his chapter on "the media"—the unwillingness of so many journalists to hold themselves to the same standards of ethical conduct to which they hold politicians and other public figures. He might have usefully discussed the bind that some journalists find themselves in when their news organizations, out of legitimate concern about ethical issues like conflict-of-interest, promulgate codes of conduct that all but forbid journalists to be active members of the communities in which they live. Too bad that, instead of spending space and energy on a pet peeve about the way some reporters take notes, Carter didn't expand his analysis of real problems of journalistic ethics and integrity.

That one chapter aside, however, Carter has written a timely, important book that anyone concerned with living an integral life ought to read and digest. That ought to include all of us. □

Don Wycliff, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

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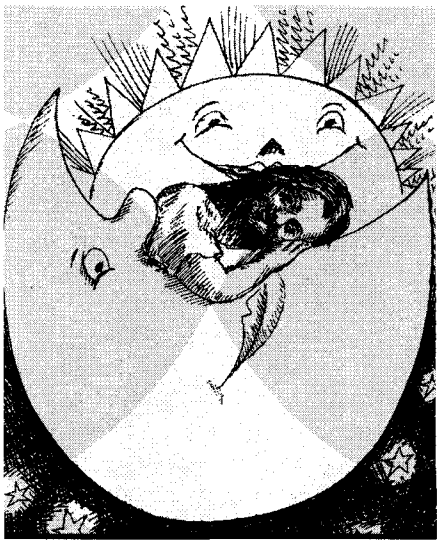
A LUMINOUS CHOREOGRAPHER

Dancing after Hours
Andre Dubus
Alfred A. Knopf, $22.50, 256 pp.

Neal Dolan

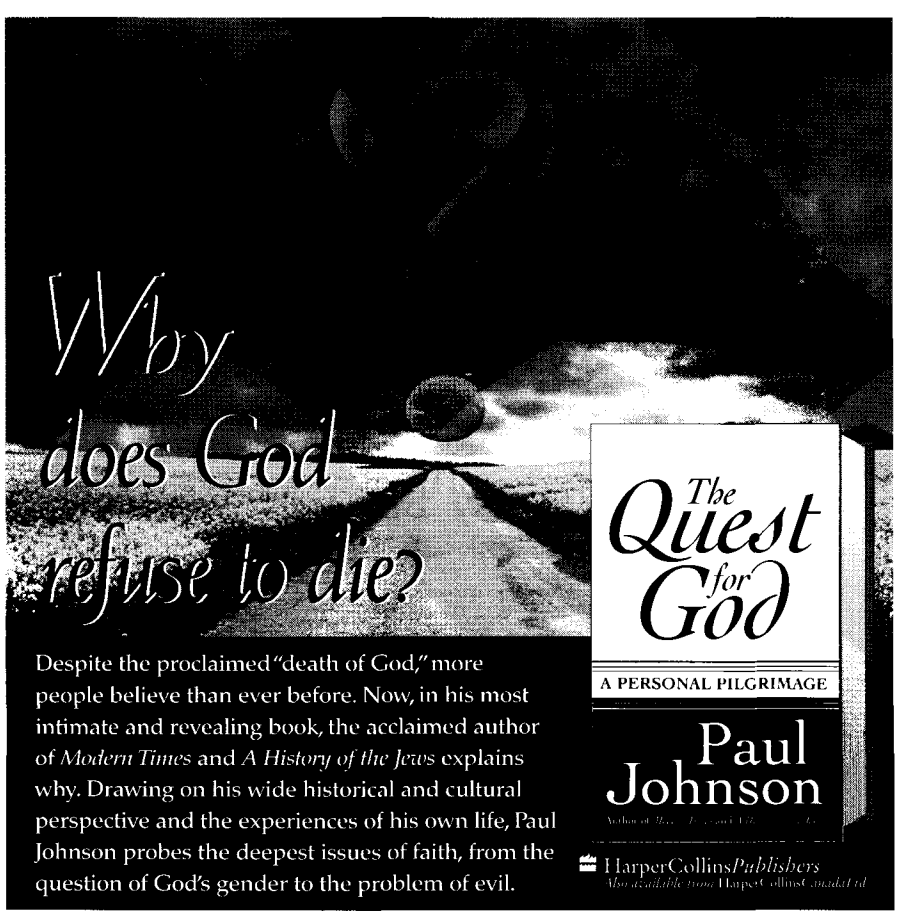


Readers familiar with the work Andre Dubus has been producing over the last thirty years will be gratified by this new collection of stories. Here in abundance are all the distinctive qualities which have established Dubus's reputation as one of the best short-story writers now working in America.

As in most of his work, the stories in this new collection are mostly set in gritty, North-of-Boston, rural and small-town landscapes. His characters follow their workaday routines and pursue their habitual pleasures in inelegant, but carefully drawn public locales—ballparks, roadhouses, modest restaurants, coffee shops, convenience stores, and plain offices. They do their loving and fighting and nurturing in ordinary middle-class living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. Their joys and sorrows are described for the most part in a simple, direct prose which keeps our attention firmly on the subject of the story rather than on the means of its telling. (Only slightly more often now does the older Dubus allow his disciplined, objective voice to mount toward a lovely, restrained lyricism.) And, most importantly, the characters in *Dancing after Hours* remain deeply felt and richly described.

Dubus's characters present an immensely refreshing counter-image to the more familiar contemporary picture of cool, amoral, postmodernist anomie. His men and women are no less sexually promiscuous than those of any other contemporary writer, and they therefore no less often find themselves alone, remote from former spouses and family members. The difference is in the emotional quality of their response to these unions and separations. Dubus's characters love fully and grieve fully. In the story "All the Time in the World," we feel a young woman's joyful sense of possibility as she sits at lunch and anticipates a shared life with a man who loves her: "She was hungry, and she talked with her friends and waited for her steak, and for all that was coming to her: from her body, from the earth, from radiant angels poised in the air she breathed." In "Love Song," a divorced woman continues stoically to mourn her departed husband as she devotes herself to raising two daughters: "the earth itself was leaving with her sad and pitying husband, was drawing away from her....She never again perceived time as she had before."

Human affection, simply stated, is Dubus's primary subject. Like D.H. Lawrence, he immerses his readers in the strong, and sometimes volatile, currents of his characters' deepest emotional and erotic attachments. Much suffering and occasional violence is the result, but also much tenderness, resilience, and considerable joy. The divorced parents, second husbands, third wives, and the many members of intact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families who populate Dubus's fiction are almost all capable of connecting intensely to one another. It is these connections which give their lives focus and meaning—as in the story "Woman on a Plane," where a sister senses that the dying brother for whom she has been grieving has made his peace with death: "Now wit and mischief were in his eyes again, and a new and brighter depth."

The collection's best story subtly recounts a self-consciously plain and timid woman's slow ascent toward fullness of feeling. The agent of her renewal is a quadriplegic named Drew who spends an evening drinking and telling stories in the bar where she, Emily, works. He is accompanied by a personal attendant, Alvin, who alertly and tenderly ministers to his needs. Emily finds herself drawn toward the pair. Drew's boisterous warmth contrasts starkly with her own abstemious wariness, and the rapport between him and Alvin bespeaks a level of trust and intimacy Emily has never known. When the bar closes, Emily joins Drew, Alvin, and some of her co-workers for some after-hours drinks. As she sits down next to Drew, he launches into an outrageous story about his recent efforts at skydiving. The man who took him up in the plane explained to him that in his condition he had a 90 percent chance of injuring himself. Drew insisted nonetheless; the man strapped him to his chest, and they leapt. The few silent moments of free fall were sublime, Drew recounts, more than compensating for the two broken legs he suffered upon landing. He couldn't feel them anyway, he explains, and he laughed and shouted ecstatically the whole time, even as his partner could hear his bones breaking.

"Oh Drew," Emily says, impulsively reaching out and taking his hand. Her surface sentiment is pity, but the words also convey a deeper feeling of awe. As the evening winds down, it becomes clear that Drew's appetite for experience has shaken something free in Emily. She takes the first few steps toward breaking out of her own form of paralysis.

In a somewhat battered version of traditional comic structure, the evening concludes with a series of unions. Like new marriage partners at the end of a Shakespeare comedy, the characters pair off before leaving the narrative stage: As Alvin drives their van out of the parking lot, Drew says "Goodnight, sweet people." The remark is the final extension of the gentle, affectionate mood and the celebration of ordinary human courage and connection with which Dubus imbues the story.

Not all or even most of the stories in this collection end on so brave a note. In general, Dubus allows himself little sentimentality and no illusions. In a portrait of a solitary, fifty-five-year-old veteran of three divorces and five children, Dubus builds toward a bitterly sorrowful conclusion in which the man finds himself consumed with remorse at the end of a casual sexual encounter. In another story, a man is deeply wounded by a beloved younger woman's decision to abort their child rather than interrupt her promising acting career. But just as "Dancing after Hours" partakes of the traditional structure of com-

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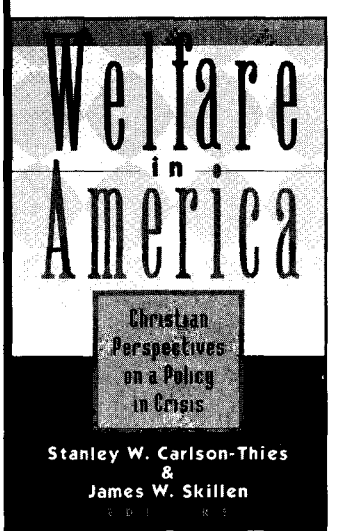

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edy, these harsher stories usually have the effect of tragedy rather than of mere bad luck. They are framed by an overarching moral vision which attempts to see human action as the combined product of individual choice and divine will.

Ritual, sin, sacrifice, guilt, and salvation through suffering are frequent themes in these stories, and remind us that Dubus is a committed Catholic who has often written on Catholic subjects in the past. Like Flannery O'Connor, he has a distinctively Catholic tendency to associate violence with tenderness, and anguish with insight. Like James Joyce, he has a distinctively Catholic tendency to sacralize the ordinary through artistic representation. And like religious writers in general, he attempts to see the apparently random and often harsh playing out of human fate not as a cosmic joke warranting cynicism, but as a transcendent mystery warranting reverence. □

Neal Dolan *is a graduate student in English at Harvard.*

MONASTICISM, NEWLY SEEN

The Cloister Walk
Kathleen Norris
Riverhead Books (Putnam), $23.95, 384 pp.

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Kathleen Norris's *Dakota* (1993) was to become an unlikely word-of-mouth best seller. I say "unlikely" because the work was difficult to classify beyond the author's own subtitle: a "spiritual geography." In meditative prose, Norris reflected lovingly on her life in Lemmon, South Dakota, through the lens of her long connection with Benedictine monasticism. Despite the fact that she is a Presbyterian lay preacher and a well-regarded poet, she saw nothing curious about such an oddly ecumenical approach to life. Monks, after all, have a nearly two-millennium history of living in sparsely populated places, and the Dakotas are, in Norris's words, the "Cappadocia of America."

Her more recent work reflects her still intense connections to monasticism. She spent the better part of a year at the Ecumenical Institute at Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota and her deep love for monasticism has also been acknowledged by the many invitations she receives to read to monastic communities. This book, in fact, reflects her participation in the liturgical life at Saint John's, her visits to other monastic houses, and her inevitable return to small-town life in South Dakota. It is a pastiche (some of the chapters have been previously published) of scriptural meditation and reflections on her monastic experience, along with sharply edged reflections on her own life and closely observed vignettes of the several communities within which she has found herself.

The revelatory character of Norris's prose is best found in the fresh eye she brings to elements of the Catholic tradition which may be overly familiar to those who were born into the tradition. Our hoary reactions to virgin saints, celibacy, the misogynist streak in our ascetical tradition are "deconstructed" by the author's angle of vision, which looks with new but hardly naive eyes. More than anything else, Norris is a contemplative reader of Scripture who follows the liturgy and reads in a manner known in the monastic tradition as *lectio divina*. The psalms live as poetry and the acid voice of Jeremiah (she has a splendid chapter on the latter) is heard afresh. Her reading of Scripture serves her well when called upon to preach at her own church in South Dakota.

It is one of the graces of our time that the best of our contemporary spiritual writers are women who are also poets. We have thus been blessed by the writings of, among others, Nancy Mairs,

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Patricia Hampl, Annie Dillard, and Denise Levertov. Gifted with the power of language and disinclined to get mired down in petty ecclesiastical squabbles or sidetracked by the banality that often passes for spirituality, they, like the householder of the gospel, bring forth "old things and new." Among that number one must include, conspicuously, Kathleen Norris who can bring alive the old desert fathers and mothers, the saints of the calendar, the idiosyncrasies of community life, the travails of small-town living, the joys and pains of marriage and old age.

Saint Thomas More once said that the world needed more monks and more housing for the poor. To which I would add: more poets who appreciate both those needs. Poets like Kathleen Norris who understand, as she says of Gregory of Nyssa, that "with God there is always more unfolding." □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame and writes the "Religion Booknotes" for* Commonweal.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

I question these judgments. In considering the case the Court will necessarily scrutinize the policies of the official U.S. military academies, which do value and honor coeducation. The Court will also take into account that men and women military personnel on active duty work and live together in bases and in combat situations. This is evidence of service to "important governmental objectives" that are not respected in single-sex schooling.

Gaffney describes the crude abuses of VMI's "rat line" to support his argument and steer women away from VMI. Maybe the Court will note that this cultural blight is nonexistent in the U.S. academies; perhaps it's the rat line, not women, that should leave VMI. When its values enter private life they can poison institutions and businesses by fostering elitism and a bottom-line mentality. Perhaps the question should be whether women should desire military training in the "cage" of a women's finishing school's sanitized environment.

DONALD F. CUDDIHEE, SR.
Greer, S. C.

The writer replies:

I agree with Mr. Cuddihee that "the crude abuses of VMI's rat line" constitute a "cultural blight." As he points out, it is not present at Annapolis and West Point, which have integrated women into their programs of military training.

But the VMI case has implications far beyond military training. As to these concerns, I am puzzled why Mr. Cuddihee thinks I presented "a veiled argument" that equal educational opportunity for women can "best be achieved by separate and equal facilities." If my argument was veiled, let me remove the veil now.

First, single-sex academies like Wellesley and Saint Mary's College

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have not just been *saying* they are committed to equal educational opportunity; that is what they have been *doing* for decades. That is why Congress expressly decided to let such colleges exist undisturbed by the federal mandate of gender equality in educational opportunity in the 1972 legislation known as Title IX.

Second, I don't recall saying anything about what is best for women, who are quite capable of choosing between coeducational and single-sex schooling—provided that both choices are sustained rather than eliminated.

Authentic pluralism means that some schools will take one approach and that others should be allowed to take another approach. If a thousand single-sex academies cannot bloom in today's aggressive packaging and selling of higher education, why not at least let a few such experiments survive? Or do we really think that the Constitution requires total uniformity on this matter? If not, then the Court should pass up this opportunity to declare that all governmental classifications on gender lines are inherently violative of our commitment to equality between the sexes.

EDWARD McGLYNN GAFFNEY, JR.

Learning to write

Re: "Desecrating Literature," by Frank McConnell [April 5]:

English professors have killed "civilized literary discourse"? What hubris! Literature has been around much longer than literature professors and will certainly outlive the present generation of *PMLA* contributors.

There is some truth to McConnell's claim that literature professors are not teaching students how to write. But the intellectual enterprise of teaching writing is alive and well in English departments, though perhaps not in literature programs. In any case, students don't learn to write by reading Shakespeare any more than they learn to paint by admiring Picasso; they learn to write not by osmosis but through instruction and practice.

Writing scholars have revived the study of the art of rhetoric, remembering that the classical canons of rhetoric included not only style, but also invention, arrangement, memory, and delivery. They have also restored the study of rhetoric in relation to other disciplines such as ethics and politics, recognizing that the choices writers make in their lives as citizens, teachers, and workers are as likely to be ethical and political as aesthetic.

BRIDGET O'ROURKE
West Lafayette, Ind.

New boy on the block

Frank McConnell's column on *PMLA* has a nice Swiftian combination of rage and accuracy. In pointing out the emperor's nudity, he voices the dismay of many in the profession which has led us to quit the Modern Language Association.

But there's good news. The MLA is no longer "the only and I mean only organization of literature professors in the U.S.," as McConnell claims. A rapidly growing alternative organization, the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, is off to a good start. The group will hold its second convention late in August in Boston. To its credit, the organization isn't content merely to grouse about the scandalous state of affairs in academia. It is simply resuming the serious study of literature as literature.

CHARLES F. DUFFY
Providence, R.I.

Source of the troubles

It is true, as Mary Pat Kelly writes in "Holding Out Hope: Clinton's Irish Policy" [April 5], that many Americans found Ireland's conflict confusing and the violence inexplicable, but that was the goal of British Information Services ["BIS"], which fed the U.S. media every misconception and half-truth imaginable. One such misconception is that "most Northern Protestants assumed that Irish-Americans back the IRA," a BIS distortion that perpetuates the "vic-

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tim" image for the loyalists to deflect their anti-Catholic bigotry. In fact most Americans, Irish or otherwise, see the unilaterally imposed division of Ireland as the cause of the conflict and the violent response of the IRA as a symptom.

President Clinton's Saint Patrick's Day appeal to turn despair into determination is a frightening prospect for the British. For decades now they have cultivated and counted on American ignorance and indifference. If Americans resolve to stay involved in the peace process, no power on earth can stand in the way of a reunification of Ireland and the all-important healing of its people.

MICHAEL J. CUMMINGS
Albany, N.Y.

The writer is a member of the national board of the Irish-American Unity Conference.

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The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is seeking qualified applicants for the Executive Director's position in the Secretariat for the Liturgy. The responsibilities of this position include, but are not limited to: providing staff support for the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy; provide consultation on pastoral-liturgical and sacramental questions; manage the routine administrative affairs of the NCCB Secretariat for the Liturgy; oversee the preparation of liturgical documentation for the meetings of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; oversee the preparation of liturgies for the plenary meetings and the Administrative Board; oversee the authorized publication of liturgical materials. Qualified candidates should possess a graduate degree or its equivalent in liturgical studies or sacred theology, preferably sacramental theology; in addition, candidate should demonstrate management, writing, and proofreading skills. A strong foundation in liturgical law and the various reformed liturgical books required. Knowledge of Latin is essential in addition to a reading knowledge of a modern language especially Spanish and/or Italian. At least 3–5 years previous experience in directing a diocesan office of worship, a center for liturgical research, or similar administrative responsibilities required. Competitive compensation package including excellent benefits. Clergy/religious and employees of a diocese/archdiocese require prior approval from their diocesan bishop or religious superior before an application can be considered. Qualified and interested applicants can submit their letter of introduction and résumé along with the appropriate approvals by June 1, 1996, to: Regina Grunert, Manager, Human Resources, NCCB/USCC, 3211 4th Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20017-1194. Fax Number 202/541-3412. EOE M/F/D/V.

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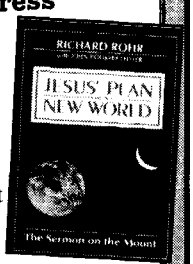

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TOASTING RYE BREAD

Valerie Schultz

I have heard that memory is 80 percent smell. I don't know if that is a verifiable percentage, but every time I put a piece of rye bread in the toaster, I think of Laurie. I was twelve years old when I discovered that toast didn't have to be white bread. I was sleeping over at my best friend Laurie's house when I first smelled the sharp, singed-caraway aroma of rye toast. I was astonished and laughed at her outrageousness; she was toasting RYE BREAD. Then she made me taste it, and I was hooked. This morning, breakfasting on my rye toast, I realized that this was only one small way my best friend had broadened my horizons, and that that's one of the things best friends do best.

Aristotle's definition of friendship is the image of one soul dwelling in two bodies. Certainly that was Laurie and I. Our friendship existed in a premenstruation, preboyfriends, prerebellion pocket of childhood. We were on the verge of everything. Our relationship turned out to be excellent preparation for marriage. It was as consuming as monogamy. We spent every free moment together. We were in the same class. We demanded to know each other's innermost thoughts. We finished each other's sentences. We had the same passions. We argued vehemently, and just as vehemently stuck together. We had little room in our hearts for other acquaintances who didn't know our codes.

Our friendship began when we were the only two new kids in the third grade of a closely-knit Catholic school. We sat together in the lunchroom, eight-year-old victims of ostracism, and our mutual protection soon turned to camaraderie. We were inseparable for five years until my parents unfeelingly decided to move. Our friendship has lasted through subsequent moves, soul-searches, college degrees, fads, and grown-up adventures.

For many years our actual communication has been sporadic. Laurie wrote when her father died, making that instinctive grab for those you desperately care about who are still living. I wrote with a wedding invitation, and the news of each new baby; she answered about every five years. Her return address has always been a surprise, leading to the many crossouts that eclectic friends make in an address book. For safe delivery, I have usually mailed letters to her mother's house. Laurie has been a poet, a reporter, an artist in Mexico, a forest ranger in remote cabins. She used to criticize my dreams of romance for being too mundane. "I know you want a white picket fence," she would chide me. I always felt a bit of a potted geranium in a window box next to her rambling wild rose. But I always knew she loved me for who I was.

I have thought of her more and more over the years, although our contact was less frequent. I now watch my four daughters grow and blossom into their own kinds of flowers, and I remember Laurie. I hear them coordinating outfits, hashing over other girls, angling for more time together, picking apart their appearance, their goals, their plans, their parents, siblings, attempting to distill their own exact essences, just as we once did. Sometimes I think I am not really old enough to be on the other side of all this. I tell my girls we had no VCRs, that we had to go to the theater to see a movie, and they ask facetiously, "Did you have electricity?"

And yet my sometimes cloudy, sometimes lovely, sometimes fierce memories of childhood are really all I have to draw on as I try to raise my daughters to be kind, honest, and full of heart. All the parenting books on my shelf cannot make me feel the tug of a best friend "breaking up" with you, or the delight of the intimacy of a day at the lake that you know will never end. Best friends beckon us to come out from the shadow of our mom and dad. They show us we have separate lives. They offer us affection solely for who we are, surprise us with the scope of another's existence, and teach us it's okay for toast not to be white bread.

My most recent letter from Laurie said that she'd left the Forest Service, gained a husband, and was living in Portland, Oregon, in a cedar house they called their "urban cabin." Last summer we met for the first time in twenty-two years. In the area to visit relatives, our family met at their cabin for dinner. We introduced husbands and children, and in a way, ourselves. We talked and laughed and caught up on the now-flown years. As I described the insight our childhood friendship had afforded me into the lives of my daughters, I realized they gained something from us now as they watched twenty-two years—twice or more their lives—melt away. Two old friends embraced, shared photos, got to know husbands and children. They saw first-hand the living truth of *Anne-of-Green-Gables* "kindred spirits" and a glimpse of their mother as girl.

To my daughters, we are old. They barely see the point of being almost forty. But someday all of this may filter back through their memories, perhaps as they raise daughters who have best friends and recall their own childhood best friends. My head is full of cycles, my heart is full of love for every turn. □

Valerie Schultz *is a free-lance writer who lives in Tehachapi, California.*

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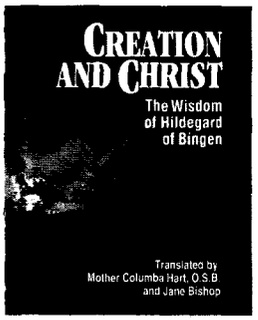

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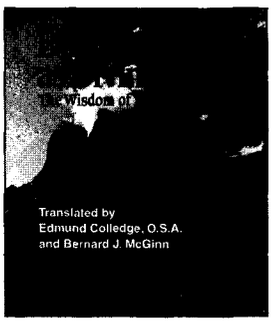

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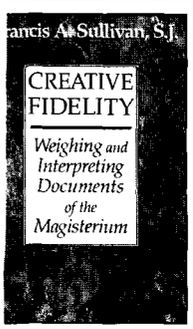

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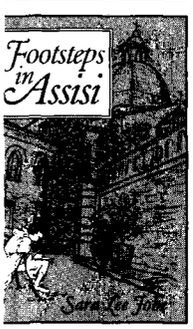

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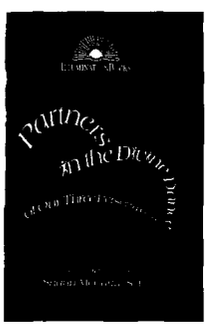

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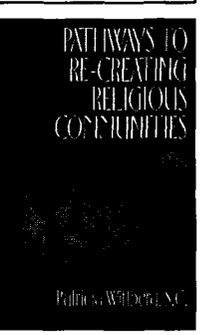

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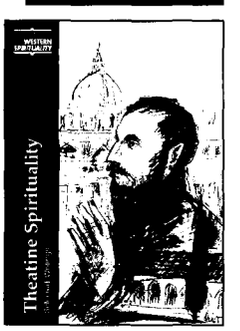

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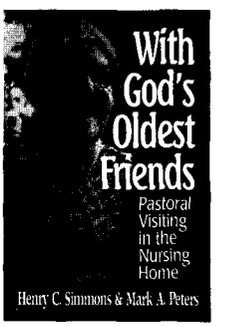

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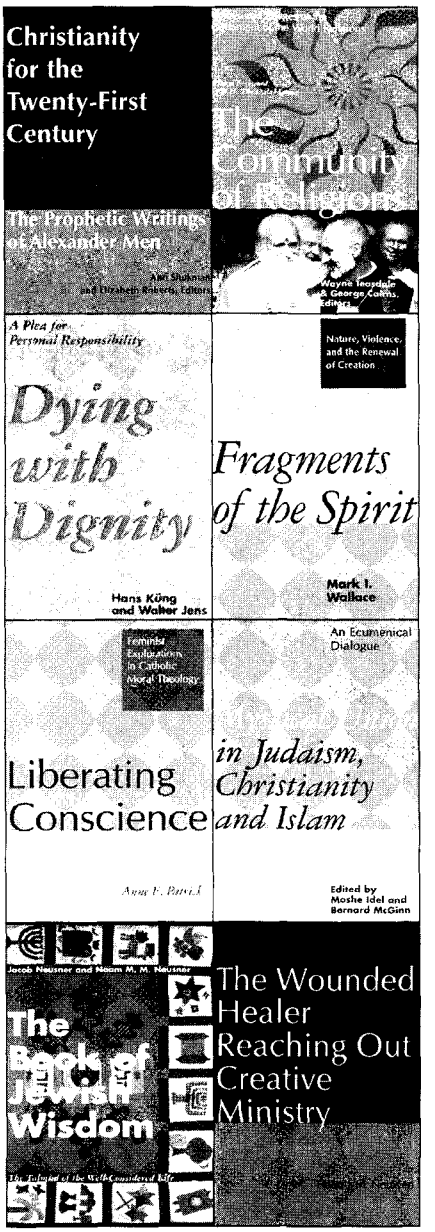
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